

2008

The WAVES: an Inspiration for the Women's Armed Services Integration Act

Travis Riley
University of Rhode Island

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Riley, Travis, "The WAVES: an Inspiration for the Women's Armed Services Integration Act" (2008). *Open Access Master's Theses*. Paper 1795.
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/theses/1795>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

THE WAVES: AN INSPIRATION FOR THE WOMEN'S ARMED

SERVICES INTEGRATION ACT

BY

TRAVIS RILEY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN

HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2008

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) on the decision to pass the U.S. Women's Armed Services Integration Act in June 1948. In addition, it examines who these women were, why they joined the WAVES, the roles they played during the war, what they gained from their experiences and how their services influenced the decision to pass the Integration Act. The performance and professionalism demonstrated by the WAVES during the war had a dramatic impact on the integration of women into the U.S. armed services. Shortly after the outbreak of war in December 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Public Law 689 authorizing the temporary use of women in the armed services. Public Law 689 created a women's reserve in the Navy that enabled women to serve for the duration of the war, plus six months. It was expected that after the war was over women would return to the traditional roles of housewife and mother or jobs acceptable for women. At the conclusion of the war many women did return to their traditional roles, but their performance could not be ignored. The WAVES had demonstrated the need to maintain a core of experienced women in the Navy in the event of another national emergency. In response to the WAVES services during the war, Congress passed the Integration Act, authorizing women to join the military on a fulltime or reserve basis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Chapter II: Women War Workers	5
Chapter III: World War II from the Perspective of Historians	12
Chapter IV: The WAVES: Off and Running	25
Chapter V: I Just Wanted to Be Where the Action Was	38
Chapter VI: Demobilization and the Push for Integration.....	57
Chapter VII: Conclusion	66
Bibliography.....	69

INTRODUCTION

When World War II began on September 1, 1939, with the invasion of Poland by Germany, the United States only watched. As the German army rolled through Europe with its blitzkrieg style of warfare, the U.S. continued its isolationist policies. It was not until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, that the U.S. entered World War II. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who had planned the attack, believed that if Japan was to defeat the U.S. in the Pacific, it must deliver a quick and deadly blow to the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. After the attack, as Japanese forces turned and headed home to safer waters, Yamamoto uttered, "I fear all we have done is awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve."¹ When Yamamoto uttered those words, he could only have been referring to the massive size and power of the U.S.: its abundant natural resources, factories and men. He could not have envisioned the dramatic changes that would occur in the U.S. after the outbreak of war with the enlistment of women into the Navy.

Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. had begun a campaign to increase its military power. In 1939 the Selective Service Act was created, and shortly after that Congress approved \$4 million for the creation of a two-ocean Navy. To support this expanded Navy the number of active duty personnel was increased, and by 1940, 13,162 officers and 145,000 enlisted men served in the Navy.² After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the needs of the Navy grew rapidly and it quickly became evident that there would be a shortage of manpower. In an effort to fill naval jobs that men left behind and to release men for duty at sea, on July 30, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Public Law 689, H.R. 6807, which allowed the recruitment and enlistment of women into the U.S. Naval Reserve. Known as the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, or WAVES, these women stepped up and filled naval positions that traditionally had been held by men. It was expected that these women would serve for the duration of the war, plus six months, and at the end of the conflict return to their roles as housewives and mothers or their jobs as secretaries, teachers, librarians, cooks or maids. Initially it was believed that women would fill positions as yeomen, store clerks, secretaries and

¹ Skylighters, "Great Quotations of World War II," <http://www.skylighters.org/quotations/quotes6.html>. December 15, 2007.

² Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the US Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 103.

communication technicians. These positions were viewed as 'feminine' and therefore it was acceptable that they be filled by women. However, the need for WAVES was so urgent that women began serving outside of positions deemed appropriate for them. Positions as aviation mechanics, parachute riggers, Link trainers and cryptologists all opened up to women.³

Three years after the war's end, Congress authorized the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, enabling women to enlist permanently in either the regular services or in the reserves. During the war women were filling an expected role, but when the war ended and the Navy began the demobilization process it became clear that the services of women were still needed. It did not have enough help to handle the paperwork necessary to return its sailors home as quickly as possible. The Navy realized this before releasing all of its WAVES from active duty and asked many to remain. It also became obvious to leaders that if the U.S. expected to maintain its naval dominance in the developing Cold War world it would have to rely on womanpower. A growing threat in the Soviet Union forced the Navy to rethink its decision to release women. The U.S. could not afford to take six months or a year to start a new woman's program in the event of another national emergency. While the move to integrate women into the Navy was tactical, designed to increase the Navy's abilities and its global influence, it could not have happened without the experiences of World War II. Had women never served in the Navy during the war or had their services been limited to positions traditionally assigned to women, the Navy would never have realized the effectiveness of women. The Navy recognized the significant role that women had played during the war and believed they could continue to contribute. Key military figures spoke out after the war in support of the role that women played during the conflict arguing that women are as capable as men, patient, attentive and in some instances better suited for certain positions. Peacetime was the opportunity to test the capabilities of women without the pressures of war. If the Navy wished to have any influence in the world, it knew that it was critical to maintain a force that could quickly counter any threat.

The WAVES are unique because they were the first to break the traditional barriers that existed between the military and women and as a result of their services during the war Congress passed the Integration Act in 1948. The idea of women serving as an auxiliary to the military was nothing new

³ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Company, 1993), 58.

when the war started and the number of women in defense work during the war was significant, but these women were quickly sent home when the conflict ended. The move by the Navy to open its doors to women and welcome them into its ranks in 1942 was ground-breaking. It was this legislation and the success of the WAVES' program during the war that helped to catapult women into the military on a permanent basis. With the passage of the Integration Act, women now had the opportunity to pursue careers in the military alongside their male counterparts. Thanks to the accomplishments of the WAVES, women can now serve their country by flying planes, commanding ships or giving orders.

Despite the WAVES' significance to U.S. women's and military history, scholars have paid little attention to their stories. Many memoirs have been written about women's experiences in the Navy during World War II. While these stories are important in helping scholars understand the WAVES, these are personal stories and do not represent the broad picture or present an objective, scholarly analysis. Scholarly work that is available often encompasses all the armed services or focuses on women's naval history over an extended period of time, failing to effectively present a thorough examination of the WAVES and its influence on the Integration Act and the present day Navy. While this work is critical in understanding women's and military history in a general sense, it does not explore in depth who the WAVES were, why they joined, the kinds of jobs they held, and how their experience in the Navy impacted both their lives and the future of the U.S. military

Using current literature and other available primary sources, this thesis attempts to fill in the blanks by looking at the experiences of these women during the war and how their services helped to propel the Navy to the next level. It will provide a thorough examination of the WAVES and demonstrate its significance to the Integration Act and the Navy. It begins with a brief introduction to the other branches of the military and their programs during the war, as well as a discussion of women defense workers. These women played a significant role as well and it is important to explore, although briefly, their experience too. Chapter three explores the scholarly work that is available on women and World War II, including women war workers in defense factories. It analyzes how scholarly views have evolved over the years and compares and contrasts the works about women war workers and those that served in the Navy. Chapters four and five provide an in-depth look at the WAVES, including the build-up to the integration of women into the Navy, initial recruiting, reasons for joining the WAVES

and the training at Smith and Hunter Colleges. The naval careers of several women are examined, as they help to provide an insightful and realistic portrayal of what it meant to be a woman in a man's world. In addition, the positive and negative aspects of being a woman in a man's world are discussed. Chapter six looks at the years after the war and the battle to pass the Integration Act.

WOMEN WAR WORKERS

Prior to the outbreak of war clear boundaries existed for men and women. Single women often found themselves working in fields traditionally defined as “women’s work”. Jobs as secretaries, cooks, typists, teachers, waitresses and maids were commonly held occupations. Married women were held to different expectations. It was their job to raise the children and tend to chores at home. Although encouraged to watch over the children, some married women did find themselves working to help maintain a higher level of living reached during the 1920s. Despite working outside the home, married women often found themselves performing the job of wage earner and homemaker. While twenty-five percent of all white women and thirty-eight percent of all black women worked before the outbreak of war, these positions typically paid less than those held by men. The war changed these expectations for women by creating new opportunities in defense factories and in the military. As a result of so many men leaving their jobs to fight in either the Pacific or Atlantic, defense factories found themselves without enough labor to fill war orders received from the government. As men headed off to war and companies struggled to meet war demands, President Roosevelt encouraged companies to turn to female labor. “In some communities employers dislike to hire women. In others they are reluctant to hire Negroes. We can no longer afford to indulge such prejudice.”⁴ Blue-collar workers, recent high school graduates, married women and even black women saw new opportunities because of the war. The creation of the icon Rosie the Riveter signified the single working woman. In addition to the Navy, the Army, Marines and Coast Guard all suffered manpower shortages and began campaigns to recruit women to fill positions which men had left behind. These opportunities enabled women to achieve, at least for the duration of the war, financial freedom, independence, courage and confidence. This chapter will briefly discuss those women that left traditional jobs for more attractive and lucrative jobs in defense factories and the armed services. Like the WAVES, these women also played critical roles in the war by supplying the necessary labor to keep the military fully supplied with aircraft, weapons, tanks and ships or by joining the other branches of the service and relieving men for duty at the front-lines. It is important to acknowledge that the WAVES were not the only ones challenging the

⁴ Sherna Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 7-10.

traditional gender barriers that existed during the war. Other women were also pushing the limits of America's working families.

With the outbreak of war and an urgent need for fighting men, it became obvious that other sources of labor would have to be found if defense factories were to meet the demands of the war. The government and factories realized that women were the only available option to satisfy the manpower shortage. "American men were heading off to war just as American industry was signing lucrative contracts with the government to produce massive numbers of bombs, guns, ships, and planes. Companies were losing the core of their labor pool at the very time they required more and more workers."⁵ If factories expected to deliver their products to the government, it was essential that they recruit women to their labor force. In an effort to fill these positions, the media began a recruiting campaign to attract women. "Because the nation mobilized for war required the active support of every member, the media continuously made women aware of their importance, not alone as mothers, wives and homemakers, but also as workers, citizens and even as soldiers."⁶ Defense factories began recruiting women to fill jobs that the men had left behind. Employers quickly learned that women could perform just as well as men, and as a result thousands of women found themselves welding sheets of metal and driving rivets in the construction of ships and planes, working in ammunition factories and performing a variety of other jobs that were traditionally held by men.

Blue-collar women workers were the first recruited for work in the defense factories. For these women, jobs in defense factories offered financial opportunities that were not available in their traditional jobs. As a result, those who worked as waitresses or maids, typically earning \$14 per week, were eager to transition to factory work where they could earn \$37 per week. Despite the government's efforts to recruit blue-collar women, more were needed to meet the increasing demands, so recent high school graduates were encouraged to enter the workforce next. "The hope was that young women, particularly those just graduating from high school, could be convinced to take factory jobs, even if it meant putting off college."⁷ These women presented no threat to the social chain-of-command, as it

⁵ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 39.

⁶ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 20.

⁷ Yellin, 43.

was believed they would work until they settled down with a husband and a family. As the drive to recruit more women intensified, in 1943 the icon Rosie the Riveter was created. She personified the single woman worker, doing her part for the war effort and her boyfriend Charlie. When still more women were needed to fill war jobs, the government turned to married women. The campaign to recruit married women was a difficult process, hampered by the belief that if married women worked they would be neglecting their responsibilities at home.⁸ Many feared that a working mother would lead to increased rates of child delinquency and threaten the stability of the American home. Nonetheless, married women entered the workforce in such large numbers that by the end of the war seventy-five percent of women who entered were married.⁹ New opportunities also existed for black women. The number of black women working as domestic servants and farm laborers fell dramatically, from seventy-two to forty-eight percent and from twenty to seven percent respectively, as they too sought work in the factories.¹⁰

Single, married, white or black, women answered the call and took jobs building planes and ships, making ammunition and stitching parachutes. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, only thirty-six women were working on ships, but by December 1942 over 160,000 women were involved in the shipbuilding process. In April 1941 only 143 women were working in seven different airplane factories, but by October 1942 those seven factories had 65,000 female employees. Advertisements encouraged women to do their part for the war. Mottos such as "Do the job he left behind", "Women in the War – We can't win without them" and "Soldiers without guns" signified women's roles.¹¹ These jobs appealed to women because they believed they were helping to bring their husbands, fathers, and sons home safely and doing their part to help win the war. In addition, these jobs offered the opportunity for financial advancement and in some cases financial freedom. The Congress of Industrial Organizations agreed to a no-strike pledge during the war in return for the government's promise to determine wages and contracts. With this promise, the wages of women increased but still did not equal

⁸ Ibid., 41-45.

⁹ William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 145.

¹⁰ Ibid., 143.

¹¹ Yellin, 46.

those received by men. By the time the war ended in 1945, the number of working women had increased from 11,970,000 in 1940 to 18,600,000.¹²

Although the number of working women increased and their roles in the war became increasingly significant, women still faced a challenging work environment because of discrimination from employers and colleagues. Women frequently were paid less or given different titles than men. At the Brooklyn Navy Yard, new women employees were called 'helper trainees' while men doing the same work received the title of 'mechanic learners'. In 1944, a woman working in manufacturing averaged \$31 per week while a man doing similar work averaged \$55 per week.¹³ Employers envisioned the use of women during the war as temporary and used this to justify the lower wages and different titles for women. For black women the challenges were even more severe. Fanny Christian Hill worked at North American Aviation during the war. As a black woman she was faced with the harsh realities of racism. "There were some departments that didn't even allow a black person to walk through there let alone work in there. Some of the white people did not want to work with the Negro," she recalls.¹⁴ Despite these inequalities, defense jobs still paid more than traditional women's jobs and thus thousands of women sought work in defense factories.

Shortly after the war ended, the number of working women in the labor force declined as men returned from the war. The number of working women dropped from thirty-five percent in 1944 to twenty-nine percent by 1947 as employers released women from their wartime responsibilities.¹⁵ Although they had proved to be reliable workers, it was expected that these women would return to their traditional roles. Employers used their deep prewar prejudices to release women from factory work or demote them to create opportunities for returning men.

After the war, employers once again claimed that their work was too physically demanding, too skilled, or too responsible for women workers to handle. No longer forced to cajole reluctant women into the labor force with empty rhetoric, they criticized women's record of performance during the war, claiming that women's work attitude was bad, that they were guilty of excessive absenteeism, and that the presence of women distracted male workers and lowered their productivity. Such generalizations justified their discriminatory policies and relieved them of the obligation to treat women workers as individuals. Despite a serious problem with turnover among veterans hired in many postwar industries, employers continued

¹² Hartmann, 21.

¹³ Yellin, 64.

¹⁴ Gluck, 45.

¹⁵ Hartmann, 24.

to act on the assumption that male workers were more competent, reliable, and in need of work than women employees.¹⁶

Employers were not the only ones who felt that women's positions during the war were temporary.

Women too believed that it was their duty to return home after the war. Clarcia Neuman accepted a position at Vultee Aircraft in San Diego, CA, during the war, knowing that when the war ended she would be sent home to resume her responsibilities there. "The women got out and worked because they wanted to work. And they worked knowing full well that this was for a short time. We hoped the war would be over in a very short time and that we could go back home and do what we wanted to do."¹⁷

Marye Stumph accepted a position at Vultee Aircraft to achieve a better financial position. When the war ended, she felt that it would be nice to stay at her job, but accepted the rhetoric that women's war jobs were temporary. "But in my time, I just figured there was men's jobs and women's jobs, and it didn't bother me too much that I wasn't doing a man's job. I was satisfied with the work I was doing."¹⁸ By 1947 the number of working women began to increase again, yet these increases were seen in jobs that were traditionally deemed appropriate for women. The only notable change for women war workers was that married women had made the transition from the home to the working world.

Like the women who flooded the defense factories looking for new opportunities and higher salaries, women also entered the Army, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps. These women were looking for new experiences, better financial opportunities and a chance to do their part for the war. A proposal in May 1941 by Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers asked for the creation of an all women's volunteer corps for the Army. It was designed to create a small auxiliary of women to assist in the national defense of the country. Although the idea saw strict opposition, it had the support of General George C. Marshall. In March 1942 the House and Senate approved the bill and on May 15, 1942, President Roosevelt signed it.¹⁹ Women in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, known as the WAAC, served in non-combat positions and under the jurisdiction of the Army. They were required to follow

¹⁶ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 172.

¹⁷ Gluck, 170.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹ Jeanne M. Holm, ed., *In Defense of a Nation: Servicewomen in World War II* (Arlington: Vandamere Press, 1998), 40.

all military rules and regulations, but were not officially recognized as an integral part of the Army. They were viewed as working alongside the Army, not in it.²⁰ “The purpose of the WAAC was to utilize women’s talents and abilities in the war effort and to provide women to serve as army support staff, freeing men for combat duty.” They worked as cooks, typists, postal workers, telephone operators, clerks, cryptographic technicians and radio intelligence officers.²¹ Although established several months before the creation of the WAVES, there was one critical difference. The WAVES were considered part of the Navy, while the women who served in the WAAC were viewed as auxiliary.

Although women were not initially recognized as part of the Army, thousands of women applied for positions and as the demands of the war continued to increase, it became evident that the Army would have to change its policies on accepting women. In an effort to stay competitive with the Navy and to help manage its organization, the Army decided to give women full military status. Following the lead of the Navy, the Army introduced a bill in January 1943 that would give women in the WAAC a new organizational name and full military status. Signed by President Roosevelt in July 1943, the bill entitled enlisted women and officers in the newly created Women’s Army Corps to the same ranks, titles and benefits as men.²²

Following the guidelines set by the Navy, the Marine Corps and Coast Guard also began recruiting women. Known as the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve and SPARs, for the Coast Guard Motto, SEMPER PARATUS – Always Ready, initial recruits came from volunteers within the Navy, including Coast Guard directory Dorothy C. Stratton.²³ Without training facilities of their own, officers trained at Smith and Mount Holyoke while enlistees trained at Hunter College. For women in the Marines, the first four weeks of training were identical to that received by the WAVES while the second phase of training taught Marine Corps policies and expectations.²⁴ At the conclusion of Coast Guard training, SPARs either reported immediately to their assigned duty station or attended specialized training alongside the WAVES. By the middle of 1943 both the Coast Guard and Marines

²⁰ Ibid., 48.

²¹ Olga Gruhzt-Hoyt, *They Also Served: American Women in World War II* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995), 61.

²² Holm, 48.

²³ Ibid., 97-98.

²⁴ Ibid., 80.

had enough manpower and experience to setup their own training facilities. The MCWR moved their training to Camp Lejeune, NC, and the SPARs leased the Palm Beach Biltmore Hotel where they trained as clerical workers, cooks, laundresses, librarians, clerks, radio operators, parachute riggers, gunnery instructors, Link trainers, control tower operators, mechanics, chemists, cryptographers, photographers and radar operators.²⁵

World War II offered new and exciting opportunities for women in the military and in defense work. Jobs that were traditionally held by men prior to the war were now being performed by women, sometimes with greater rates of success. Without the use of woman power during the war, it would have been impossible for the military and defense factories to meet their needs. Single women working in defense factories were able to achieve higher wages as a result of the war, but were unable to maintain these wages when the war ended. Married women experienced gains as a result of the war. When the war ended, most were released from their war jobs but many were able to find work elsewhere, although pay was typically lower than what they received during the war. The war had shown that married women could work outside the home and that they were no longer as financially dependent on their husbands. Although black women had more difficulty entering defense factories, many were able to leave their low paying jobs as laundresses and domestic servants for work in factories. These women had played an important and necessary role in the war, but were unable to maintain their war gains like the WAVES. For women who joined the Army, Coast Guard and Marines, the military offered new experiences, travel, an opportunity to support the war effort and a chance at financial independence. These women came from all corners of the country and filled positions that men were leaving behind. While there is little doubt about the necessity of utilizing women in these organizations, it is important to note that the Army, Marines and Coast Guard followed in the footsteps of the WAVES, using it as a blueprint in building their own organizations.

²⁵ Ibid., 103-105.

WORLD WAR II FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORIANS

When thinking of women and World War II, images of the icon Rosie the Riveter and the massive influx of women into the labor market are evoked. These visions often include women welding ships and planes, driving rivets or performing various other tasks for the war effort. Or the images of the thousands of women that joined the military looking for new experiences are recalled. When the war ended and peace returned, memories of 'Leave it to Beaver' and the classic mother June Cleaver, the hard working father Ward and the children, Wally and Beaver often surface. These visions often include a house with a small yard and a white picket fence and a happy family that is enjoying life in the suburbs. In this quintessential image of suburban America, there are no concerns or worries. While many scholars have examined these years in detail, their conclusions differ dramatically. Scholars who have studied civilian women in postwar America have argued that the war was only a temporary abandonment of gender roles and that when it ended roles for men and women were embraced again. However, over time historians have become more critical, arguing that while Americans embraced traditional gender roles in the postwar, they were unhappy with their postwar responsibilities and not ready to return to accepted ways. Some men and women began to resent the roles that they had been predetermined to take. Military historians take a different perspective, arguing that the war opened up new opportunities for women and that it was clearly a catalyst for change. It was a foundation that helped to catapult women to the next level and gave them the opportunity to prove that they were capable of prospering in a man's world.

Early scholarship depicting America in the years after the war focuses on a return to traditional gender roles. These sources acknowledge that the war temporarily challenged the roles of men and women, but when it ended and sailors and soldiers returned home, Americans were ready to settle back into family life in suburban America. Men and women knew that their roles in the war were temporary and that when the fighting stopped, men would return to their positions as fathers and breadwinners and women would return to their roles as housewives and mothers or positions as laundresses, cooks and maids. There was no intention of incorporating women into a world dominated by men. Although the postwar years saw an increase in the number of employed women, many of these women worked in

jobs traditionally deemed 'women's work' and therefore there were no gains made by women.

Traditional gender roles were reinforced as women returned to their predefined roles after the war.

Alan Clive's work in 1979 argues that preconceived gender roles did not disappear with the influx of women into the job market during the war and that discrimination towards women was a daily occurrence, even as America begged women to 'Do the job He left behind'. Although incorporated into defense factories, women were seen as temporary replacements and were not eagerly welcomed. These women often faced harassment and were promoted at slower rates than men. "Male workers and union leaders did not go out of their way to welcome women employees. Men vociferously protested and sometimes went on strike against policies favorable to women, such as the movement of women to better shifts that they were not entitled to by strict seniority."²⁶ Clive also suggests that people feared working women would threaten the stability of the nation's youth as they had less time for their children. As a result, the nation would experience greater rates of child delinquency. Instead of embracing women's roles during the war, men ferociously protested their entrance into a man's world and did all they could to enforce gender roles.

Lois W. Banner is one of the earliest sources on women's roles in World War II and the postwar. Writing in 1974, she argues that the gains made by women during the war were temporary and that after the war these women were encouraged to return to their traditional roles. In addition, those women that were lucky enough to keep their wartime jobs were often unable to advance professionally or receive the same wages for similar work because employers favored returning male workers. Although government regulations required employers to pay women the same wages as male workers, few acknowledged these rules. For many women who did work during the war, it was tempting to continue working after the war, but lower wages and high rates of termination forced many out of their wartime jobs and back into traditional women's work.

Few were the commentators who, like the Women's Bureau staff, suggested to the public and to the government that many women might not want to return to domesticity or to lower salaries and that arrangements ought to be made to accommodate their desires in terms of equal opportunities for advancement, equal pay for equal work, and publicly funded day-care centers.²⁷

²⁶ Alan Clive, *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 190.

²⁷ Lois W. Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1974), 206.

Banner sees the war years as providing temporary relief from the traditional gender roles for women, but once it was over, old ways returned as women were forced back into conventional roles in American society.

Sheila M. Rothman's 1978 work argues that the war did not create new opportunities for women. She believes that the war forced companies to abandon traditional gender roles only temporarily and that the new opportunities women experienced during the war years were short-lived. After the war ended and sailors and soldiers returned home, it was expected that women would gladly give up their war jobs and return to their positions as laundresses, cooks, maids, teachers or wives. Rothman also believes that women knew of these expectations and accepted them when they took jobs in war factories. "At the very same time that the federal government pleaded with women to take war jobs, it made eminently clear that work for them was an emergency measure and a temporary expedient. When peace returned, they were to return to their homes."²⁸ Women understood and accepted this. Rothman does acknowledge the fact that the number of working women increased in the years following the war, but she argues that those increases were seen in areas typically deemed appropriate for women and that this was not enough to constitute a revolution. The war was no more than an interruption that sent women temporarily into the factories.

Like Rothman, Karen Anderson believes that women's entrance into the job market during the war filled a temporary void. Writing in 1981 she argues that the war momentarily opened new opportunities for women, but that the need for a female labor pool was brief and therefore not a revolution. It was their duty to work in the factories during the war to help bring their husbands, fathers and brothers home, but after the war it was their obligation to return to their traditional roles and help protect the confidence of their men. "In the absence of a new commitment to change, the postwar shift of women from high-paying industrial work to low-skill, low-paying, dead-end jobs in traditional 'women's' categories became inevitable."²⁹ Companies did not expect or want women to remain in higher paying jobs.

²⁸ Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 222.

²⁹ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 172.

These works focused on the war industry and jobs traditionally held by men. They argue that women's roles during the war were only temporary and that their services reinforced the traditional gender roles. While they acknowledge the dramatic increase in the number of working women in the years after the war, they point to the fact that women were forced back into conventional roles after the conflict and as a result, women's gains were severely limited. In continuing to work in positions traditionally defined as feminine, women reinforced the belief of separate spheres for men and women. While this scholarship is important to understanding the history of women during and after World War II, it does not paint a complete picture. Within the last twenty years new scholarship has emerged that has built upon these early sources and provided a more nuanced perspective.

Women that had discovered themselves during the war continued their push for equality in the postwar years, unions thrived and the influx of married women into the labor market began to alter roles within the family. Despite married women's entrance into the working world and an increase in the number of working women, women still tended to hold jobs that were considered feminine. Employers eagerly pushed women out of war jobs in favor of returning men and paid women smaller wages. In addition, a developing Cold War with the Soviet Union and the constant threat from nuclear annihilation turned Americans attention to families. Americans sought security and comfort by putting their faith in family and children, believing that they would rid the world of communism. Families in postwar America were beginning to grow unhappy with their expected roles.

Using the electrical and auto industries as examples, in her 1987 book, Ruth Milkman argues that employers accepted women into their labor pool as a temporary measure and that when the war ended, they expected women would return to prewar roles. The return to a gender-defined division of labor was not necessarily a result of an embrace of domesticity after the war, but instead employers pushing women out of wartime jobs. When the war did finally end, employers were eager for women to leave and did all they could to encourage their departure. "Wartime female substitution was an experiment that employers had undertaken unwillingly and only because there was no alternative. Despite the success with which women were integrated into 'men's jobs', the war's end meant an end to

the experiment, and management breathed a collective sigh of relief.”³⁰ Auto and electrical manufacturing were men’s jobs and management was determined to enforce this. They assigned women to new jobs and demanded they achieve the same skill level as men in a fraction of the time, enforced specific rules in an effort to get women fired, made work extremely difficult so as to encourage women to quit and enforced age limits for women that did want to continue working.³¹ Despite managements desire to favor returning male veterans, Milkman believes that a permanent shift had occurred for women as a whole. By 1948, the number of married women working was higher than in 1944 and this trend would continue. “In this respect, far from being a temporary deviation, the war was a watershed period that left women’s relationship to work permanently changed.”³²

In her 1988 analysis of postwar America, Elaine Tyler May argues that Americans, some willingly and some reluctantly, accepted traditional gender roles after the war so as to feel secure in a dangerous world. After the war ended, Americans sought security by moving to the suburbs and embracing the roles of men, women and family. These families had survived a depression and a world war. A psychological war with the Soviet Union and the threat of utter destruction endangered society causing Americans to turn their attention to children. The family provided a sense of security and stability. “A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation. Children would also be a connection to the future and a mean of replenishing a world depleted by war deaths.”³³ Family offered comfort and security in a world that seemed dangerous and impossible to contain. Children provided hope and a link to the future. Women eagerly married and sought the security of family to subdue these fears.

Although it was the foundation of the family that women relied on to feel secure and comfortable, it was also where they struggled. When the war ended, families expected to settle down into a simple life in the suburbs where they could live out their dreams and forget about the dangers of the world. They had high expectations of family and marriage. “They expected to build a home that would provide them with security and fulfillment, and shield them from the harsh realities of public life

³⁰ Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1987), 101.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 114-118.

³² *Ibid.*, 100.

³³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 23.

in the cold war era.”³⁴ However, this was far from reality as many postwar American families struggled to stay together. May argues that Americans, particularly women, felt unhappy and resentful about their roles in the postwar. Women believed that they had settled in their marriages and that they had given up their true passions in life to enjoy a secure one instead. They had sacrificed for the greater good. “For the home contained not only sex, consumer goods, children, and intimacy, but enormous discontent, especially for women. For many, there was no place else for this discontent to go, so it remained contained in the home.”³⁵ Women were eager to continue working after the war ended. They had discovered that they were capable of supporting themselves and found satisfaction in postwar jobs. They had learned that they could work in a man’s world and that they did not have to be financially dependent on their husbands to survive. Despite women’s eagerness to continue working after the war, policy makers and industry pushed women out of their war jobs and asked them to turn their attention to family. “But, the policies of the government, private sector employers, and even unions made it difficult for women to avoid economic independence, even if they continued to hold jobs. Although it was still possible for most women who wanted a job to find one, the economic status of employed women deteriorated significantly after the war.”³⁶ Despite the push towards domesticity and the perfect family, American women were not happy. Women’s jobs during the war had given them hope, but as America began to demobilize, women were let down as they were forced back into positions historically considered appropriate for them. While mothers undoubtedly loved their families, the position of homemaker did not provide the same satisfaction that women had experienced during the war. The genie was out of the bottle and women began to resent established ways.

In her 1994 essay, Dorothy Sue Cobble argues that postwar America was a difficult time for women. While gender roles may have been embraced by some women or enforced by employers, others fought for a woman’s right to continue working after the war. Not everyone was white, middle-class and living the American dream. “Far from being an era of retreat for women’s activism, working-class feminism flowered in the postwar decades, due in part to the steady increase of wage-earning

³⁴ Ibid., 184.

³⁵ Ibid., 207.

³⁶ Ibid., 76.

women and the rise of union power.”³⁷ Unions that had represented women during the war continued representation in the years following the conflict. Unions such as Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees, the National Federation for Telephone Workers and the United Auto Workers represented women as they were laid off from their war jobs. “Despite the wholesale layoff of women in manufacturing during reconversion, women emerged in a much stronger position within the labor movement than before the war.”³⁸ These working-class women believed in the majority and not the individual. Instead of focusing on an individual’s advancement into positions historically held by men, these women fought for improvements in jobs traditionally held by women. “Union feminists sought advancement as a group, not merely as individuals. They argued that economic justice and fair treatment for the majority of women can be provided only through employee representation and collective power, not through individual upward mobility... Upward mobility for the few did not seem as important as the economic advancement of the many.”³⁹

Like their predecessors, these scholars acknowledge the embrace of traditional gender roles after the war ended. Employers that had been forced to hire women during the war were eager to push women out of their war positions when the conflict ended. Americans also embraced the roles of family with the hope that it would help alleviate the threat of nuclear destruction. Many believed children were a link to the future. Men and women wanted comfort, security and a family to protect them from the communist threat and other evils of the world. They married not for love, but for stability. Despite the embrace of gender roles, increases in union activity for the working-class spread and women who wanted jobs found support within these unions. Larger numbers of employed women created strength in numbers and as a result, women argued for better benefits for the majority.

Unlike scholars who examine civilian women, military historians support the idea of a postwar revolution and see the years following 1945 as a transition away from traditional gender roles. They view the contributions of women in the military during the conflict as critical to the successes of women after the war. The passage of the Integration Act was a milestone in the history of the military. It

³⁷ Dorothy Sue Cobble, “Recapturing Working-Class Feminism: Union Women in the Postwar Era,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

symbolized the success of women's military service during the war. While it did have restrictions, it was still a significant achievement that allowed women the opportunity to seek careers in a field historically defined as men's work.

Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall were among the first to write about women's contributions to the war effort and the Integration Act. Writing in 1993, they argue that the WAVES were a catalyst for women's permanent incorporation into the peacetime Navy. While the Integration Act did limit where women could work and what they could do, it was significant because it was an acknowledgment by the Navy and the military of the work done by women.

From today's vantage point, the Integration Act might more accurately have been named the Incorporation Act. Prohibited from duty in any unit designated as having a combat mission, women were effectively not integrated into the heart of the military and naval professions: that is, they were merely incorporated in service organizations. Still, the act remains a landmark in the history of women in the armed forces, and subsequent legislation has amended some of its more discriminatory provisions. Its passage implied that the armed forces could not allow themselves the luxury of depending solely on manpower.⁴⁰

In a short amount of time, women had earned the respect of male sailors, discovered confidence and independence, and extended the number of women who could serve in the military. Their services during the war were invaluable. "In the midst of wartime's turbulence and uncertainty, the WAVES created an invaluable legacy for all the Navy women who followed them: spirit, hard work, competence, and dignity. The magnitude of their contributions helped to secure for women a place in the peacetime Navy."⁴¹ Had it not been for the herculean efforts of the WAVES, the present day Navy would be dramatically different.

Olga Gruhzt-Hoyt's 1995 work argues that women who served in the military during World War II forever changed the structure and dynamics of the military. "The positive impact of the women in the military in World War II brought about significant change in the discriminatory attitudes of the male military. As a result, many nontraditional military specialties have been opened to women."⁴² Using the accounts of twenty-eight women, Holt examines the successes, failures and hardships encountered by the women that served during the war. For example, Betty Doolittle's contributions to

⁴⁰ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Company, 1993), 113.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴² Olga Gruhzt-Hoyt, *They Also Served: American Women in World War II* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995), xvii.

the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944 were small but had a significant impact on naval operations. Through their services during the war, women were able to earn the respect of their male colleagues, change the perceptions of military leaders, discover confidence and pave the way for the passage of the Integration Act and for future generations of women in the military. "In all fields, the women learned a sense of self-esteem and an independence that would help push the so-called women's liberation movement into overt action."⁴³ The war had taught these women independence and confidence, traits that they would carry with them throughout the rest of their lives.

Writing in 1998, Retired General Jeanne Holm believes women were able to find their place in the military due to the competence and persistence of the military's young female leaders. She argues that these women were innovative, strong and catalysts for change. Although they lacked the military experience, they made up for it in other areas. "The best things the line directors had going for them were: their backgrounds and personal qualities – experience with women, basic intelligence, and ability to get along with people."⁴⁴ These women were able to manipulate and convince men that the services of women were needed in the military. She considers this a milestone due to the fact that these women lacked any military experience and were constantly doubted or taken seriously because of the fact that they were women in a man's world. By the time the war ended in 1945, Holm believes that women had proved themselves as sailors and soldiers and that they had earned the respect of their male counterparts. "There can be little doubt that the women proved their value early on. The record of World War II is replete with testimonials attesting to the excellence of the women's contributions, their disciplined characters, and their overall positive effect on all the services. If there was one complaint common to all of the services, it was that there were not enough women."⁴⁵

Not only were women leaders instrumental in guiding the WAVES program but WAVES sailors also proved critical to the organization's success. Writing in 2001, Susan H. Godson argues that the WAVES had a tremendous impact on the role of women in society by teaching them special skills that they had always been denied. In addition, Godson sees the postwar years as a move away from traditional women's roles and the Integration Act as a culmination of women's accomplishments in the

⁴³ Ibid., xvii.

⁴⁴ Jeanne M. Holm, ed., *In Defense of a Nation: Servicewomen in World War II* (Arlington: Vandamere Press, 1998), 35.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 50.

military during World War II. "The members of the Women's Reserve set the precedent, watershed or not, of providing competent service to a nation in need. Permanent change comes slowly, but these women had set in motion a process that would develop and mature."⁴⁶ Even though the Integration Act had restrictions, it was still an incredible victory for women. It challenged the belief that the military was a man's world and only occupied by women in the event of a national emergency. It was a foundation on which the Navy and military could build.

While the Integration Act had restrictions, Emily Yellin still believes it was a historic change. Inspired by the death of her mother and the collection of World War II papers that were discovered after her death, Yellin writes in 2004 to share the story of her mother and the stories of the thousands of women who entered the Navy, Army, Coast Guard, Air Force and the defense industry. Yellin sees these women as opportunists, taking advantage of the chances presented to them during the war. The war was the chance for women to find themselves, discovering confidence, jobs skills, friends, and personal satisfaction. "Through my mother, and all the women in this book, I came to see that the small things, the less dramatic changes in the world, were sometimes the most revolutionary."⁴⁷ Those men who returned from the war came home to a country that was transforming from one with clearly defined gender roles to one that was more fully incorporating women into the working world. Although the changes that occurred in the military had restrictions, these changes were significant enough to set in motion a changing pattern of business for the military and the civilian world.

The men who had gone to fight in World War II to preserve the American way of life would come home to a place where, for many women, that way of life had been transformed. Masses of lower- and middle-class American women had tasted a kind of freedom they had never known before. For some it was sweet, for others more bitter. But the genie was out of the bottle. Women had had a taste of making their own money and having their own life outside the home, and many had liked it. Although society in general could not discern it right away, in hindsight it is clear that no matter how hard anyone tried to coax her, that genie was not going back in. A revolution had begun in working life and home life in America.⁴⁸

The roles played by women during the war had dramatically altered the gender barriers that existed prior to the war and gave women the confidence and skills to stand on their own two feet. It was the beginning of a revolution.

⁴⁶ Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the US Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 130.

⁴⁷ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 381.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

While much has been written about roles of women in World War II, the literature does not all paint the same picture. Early literature on civilian women focuses on the return to traditional gender roles after the war. These scholars view the war as a temporary abandonment of gender roles. When it ended, men returned to their roles as breadwinners and women returned to the roles as housewives and mothers or acceptable female jobs. The large influx of women into the labor pool was a temporary necessity in order to meet the high demands of the war. These sources are important pieces of literature, but they do not represent the complete picture of postwar America for civilian women. Recent scholarship has emerged that has shed new light on civilian women in postwar America. Although this scholarship supports the idea that preconceived gender roles were embraced after the war, these scholars argue that postwar America was much more complicated than that. Men and women were unhappy with their roles, but accepted them as a way to deal with the nuclear threat. They believed they had settled in marriage and looked towards family for comfort and security. Despite embracing preconceived roles, women were eager to continue working and the postwar became not only a time of family and traditional roles, but also activism. Unions that had emerged during the war continued to thrive in the postwar years. Scholarship that focuses on women in the military during the war portrays a much happier postwar America. Women who had served in the military during the war made significant gains after it ended. These sources argue that women's accomplishments in the military during the war lead to the passage of the Integration Act in 1948. It was the foundation on which women could begin building careers in the military.

Why has scholarly literature on civilian women and World War II become much more critical over time, and why are the views of military historians more upbeat and optimistic? The works of Banner, Rothman, Anderson and Clive provide an early glimpse of women and World War II. These are all important resources, but they are first stabs at women's experiences during and after the war. The works of Milkman, May and Meyerowitz are a continuation of these early sources, however, they provide a more refined perspective. Although gender roles were embraced after the war, men and women were not always happy with their roles. Some women wanted to continue working when the war ended, but were forced out by employers who were only willing to hire returning men. Although the number of working women increased, these advances were seen in areas typically defined as

women's work. A nuclear threat caused Americans to marry not necessarily for love, but for security. They believed that family and children would provide protection from a dangerous and uncontrollable world. These roles were embraced more for necessity than desire.

On the other hand, military historians have a reason to be more optimistic. The services of women who served in the Navy during the war were still required when it ended. Despite the Navy's early intention of sending women home six months after the war ended, many stayed onboard and continued to serve in the Navy. They were desperately needed to assist with the paperwork necessary to release sailors and soldiers from their war positions. As the Cold War developed, the Navy and military realized that if it expected to maintain its military dominance, it would have to rely on woman power to meet this new challenge. Admirals and generals who had once opposed the idea of women serving now fully supported their inclusion into the military. Although the passage of the Integration Act was an uphill battle from the time it was first introduced and had restrictions when it finally passed, it was still a significant step forward. Women now made up a percentage, albeit a small one, of a field historically dominated by men. Women had managed to maintain their presence in the military when the war ended and scholars undoubtedly recognize this significant achievement. Unfortunately for women who worked in defense factories during World War II, the nation did not mobilize at the same level during the Cold War. Automobile and ship factories that had once converted from producing consumer goods to military equipment, returned to the production of ships and cars once the war ended. As these same factories changed from the production of war materials to consumer goods, women found they were no longer welcomed. As civilian war jobs disappeared for women, so did the opportunities. Just as quickly as women were asked to fill defense jobs in factories, they were asked to give them up.

Women undeniably played a major role in World War II and as a result, there were significant breakthroughs for women in the military. As a direct result of women's accomplishments, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948 and enabled women to pursue military careers. The WAVES played the most significant roles as they were the first to break the traditional barriers that existed between women and the military. It was the WAVES' work that helped lay the foundation for the Integration Act and the careers of women in the military today. This project is one of

the first attempts to uncover who these pioneers were and how their services in the war impacted the passage of the Integration Act. Scholarly work available today offers two view points. One looks at women in the Navy over an extended period of time and the other views women in all branches of the military during World War II. Together these sources provide an important but general overview of women's military history. This thesis is unique because it highlights a specific period in time and a specific group of women, the WAVES in World War II. It explores who these women were, why they joined, what they did while in the Navy, how the experience enhanced their lives and what their contributions did for the Navy and Integration Act. It is the first exploration of a possible connection between women's contributions in the Navy during World War II and the passage of the Integration Act. After researching the WAVES and its contributions to the war effort, it is difficult to argue that women returned to traditional ways after the war. The war was a catalyst for change in the Navy and the dramatic impact of the WAVES has been recognized by military historians who like myself believe that the war opened new opportunities for women in the military.

THE WAVES: OFF AND RUNNING

While the WAVES have undoubtedly had the greatest impact on women and the Navy, they could not have done it without help from their predecessors. Long before the creation of the WAVES, women had managed to influence the Navy in small ways. Women who first served their country as matrons in hospitals, nurses in the Navy Nurse Corps and Yeomanettes during World War I helped to provide critical experiences to the Navy and women. Joy Bright Hancock served as a Yeomanette during World War I and experienced the thrill of being thrown into the Navy without any kind of orientation. When the war ended she left the Navy, but was able to use that knowledge to help kick start the WAVES. Although the roles may have been small, it was these experiences that offered women a glimpse into Navy ways and helped lay the foundation for the WAVES creation. In addition, the Women's Advisory Council, a board designed to help plan for the utilization of women in the Navy, provided insightful ideas for utilizing women in a man's world. Its preliminary work identifying possible billets and training sites for women enabled the WAVES to attract talented and eager recruits. These early experiences provided critical knowledge that the WAVES would undoubtedly have to rely on in its early stages. In addition, these experiences helped it obtain a sustainable and reliable level quickly. It is not hard to imagine the difficulty the WAVES would have experienced had it not been for women's roles in World War I.

Although it was the WAVES who ultimately changed the face of the Navy, women found ways to serve the Navy long before World War II. In February 1811 the United States established its first naval hospitals, and shortly thereafter William P.C. Barton, a surgeon in the Navy, submitted guidelines to Congress for governing these hospitals. Under the supervision of a surgeon, two surgeon's mates, a steward, a matron, a ward master, four nurses and servants, each hospital could care for 100 men. Often women were given the duty of matron because it was assumed that they were best suited to preserve the cleanliness of the patients and the facility. In 1814, the matron's responsibilities

were extended to include laundry and kitchen work. In addition, Barton also requested that women be used as nurses, but his request was denied.⁴⁹

Although the initial request to use women as nurses was denied, it would not be long before the Navy reversed its decision and called on women to join the Naval Nurse Corps to help with its medical responsibilities. In 1908 Congress authorized the Naval Nurse Corps and Esther Hasson was appointed its superintendent. Two years after its creation, there were seventy-two female nurses serving. Upon entering the Naval Nurse Corps, women were sent to Washington, D.C., for three months of training before going to their duty stations in Washington, D.C., New York, Norfolk, or Annapolis.⁵⁰ "Blessed with effective, competent superintendents and supportive surgeon generals, the Navy Nurse Corps had become organized and accepted only well-trained and highly qualified graduate nurses."⁵¹

Faced with growing responsibilities as a result of World War I, the Navy again looked to women to help meet its needs. Affectionately known as 'Yeomanettes', these women joined the Navy to help relieve men for duty at sea. Many worked in clerical jobs, but others worked as translators, draftsmen, and fingerprint-experts. Prior to their enlistment, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels asked, "Is there any law that says a yeoman must be a man?" The answer he received was negative. "Then enroll women in the Naval Reserve as yeomen," he said, "and we will have the best clerical assistance the country can provide"⁵² On March 19, 1917, the Navy Department sent a notice encouraging the use of women in the Naval Coast Defense Reserve. It stated that nothing in the Naval Reserve Force Act of August 29, 1916, prohibited women from enlisting in the Naval Coast Defense Reserve. By the end of the war, 11,000 women had responded to the Navy's need; however, when the war ended the Navy no longer needed their services and all women were released from duty.⁵³

In the years following World War I, the services of women were minimal, limited only to the Navy Nurse Corps. It was their duty to help respond to emergencies. The Navy Nurse Corps assisted

⁴⁹ Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the US Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-43.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵² Naval Historical Center, "Women in the U.S. Navy: Historic Documents," <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq48-3b.htm>. December 15, 2007.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

when a roof collapsed in Washington, D.C., in January 1922 and when a boiler on a ship in Newport, RI, exploded.⁵⁴ When the Navy began preparing for the possibility of war in the late 1930s, its vision did not include women. In 1935 the Vinson-Trammell Act authorized the creation of 102 new ships for the Navy. In 1938 Congress voted to create the Naval and Marine Corps Reserve and specifically stated that it was to include men only. A two-ocean Navy was also created, putting a heavier burden on the Navy. A year later the selective service started.⁵⁵ When the war finally began in December 1941, the Navy was already faced with a shortage of sailors, thus opening the door for the recruitment of women into the Naval Reserve.

Realizing that it would be unable to support its continued growth with men alone, the Navy once again began exploring the use of women. In December 1941, Rogers asked Rear Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, head of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, if he envisioned a need for women. Although he personally opposed the idea, Nimitz managed to set his beliefs aside and asked other departments within the Navy if they saw a need for women.⁵⁶ Many shared Nimitz's belief that the Navy was not a proper place for a lady. The Office of the Judge Advocate General wrote, "No use for the services of Women's Auxiliary is seen at this time." The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery responded by saying, "Do not visualize a need" and the Bureau of Yards and Docks said, "Such a corps is unnecessary to assist this bureau in carrying out functions."⁵⁷ Even the outbreak of war was not enough to convince policy makers and some in the Navy that women could be used in a time of war. It was believed that the military was not the proper place for women.

Others disagreed with the notion that the Navy was not the proper place for a woman, believing instead that women could be used effectively. Joy Bright Hancock, who had served as a yeoman during World War I and had remained active as a civilian working in the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics, had other ideas. She believed deeply that women could contribute and began thinking and talking about how women could be used within the Naval Reserve. To learn more, in early 1941 she traveled to Canada to see how its Navy was utilizing female sailors.⁵⁸ Hancock was not the only one

⁵⁴ Godson, 100.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 103.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁷ Joy Bright Hancock, *Lady In the Navy* (Annapolis, MD: The Naval Institute Press, 1972), 51.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 49.

who believed women could serve. The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations suggested that women be used to support naval operations, specifically its communications network. Because these women would be handling classified information, the office believed they would need to be integrated into the Navy. The Bureau of Aeronautics also envisioned a need for women. "Noting the educational and social changes which had taken place between the two wartime periods of service, BuAer [Bureau of Aeronautics] visualized a much broader scope of activity for women in the Navy than had been involved in World War I and indicated the firm belief that they could be employed in a wide variety of technical and skilled positions."⁵⁹ The Bureau of Aeronautics argued women could successfully perform jobs in many of the skilled and technical positions available in the Navy. The Bureau of Naval Personnel also envisioned a small need for women, but only if women were integrated into the Navy.⁶⁰

With support growing for the use of women in the Navy, in February 1942 Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox proposed an amendment to the Naval Reserve Act of 1938, requesting that women be integrated into the Navy. His idea was quickly rejected by the Bureau of Budget because it was believed that if women were to be used, then they should be used as auxiliaries. Not discouraged, the Bureau of Aeronautics continued its push to integrate women into the Navy. Dr. Margaret Chung, a highly respected physician and surgeon from San Francisco, was asked to support the integration of women into the Navy. Chung turned to Representative Melvin Maas of Minnesota to help her introduce legislation. On March 18, 1942, he proposed legislation for the integration of women into the Navy. The bill was received positively by the House Naval Affairs Committee and passed, but was quickly rejected by the Senate because it did not follow the same guidelines that the Army used in creating the WAACs in May 1942. Many in the Senate believed that a woman's place was in the home, but that if they were to be used in the military then they needed to be used in positions suitable for women.⁶¹ They believed military service would deprive women of their feminine qualities and jeopardize their roles as housewives and mothers.

As the demands of the war continued to mount, the Navy turned to women educators for help. With the assistance of Dr. Virginia Gildersleeve, dean of Barnard College, the Navy was able to

⁵⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁰ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Company, 1993), 29.

⁶¹ Ibid., 31.

convince Dr. Elizabeth Reynard, a professor of English at Barnard, to work under the supervision of Rear Admiral Randolph Jacobs, Chief of Naval Personnel. It was her job to assist with the creation of the Women's Advisory Council. "Reynard was already noted for her studies on women's abilities and the types of work for which they might be particularly suited."⁶² On April 27, 1942, the Women's Advisory Council met at Barnard to discuss the possibilities of using women in the Navy. Comprised of eight women educators, its job was to design a plan that would allow for the successful integration of women into the Navy.⁶³ Mildred McAfee, president of Wellesley College and future director of the WAVES, attended the meeting at Barnard and remembered that everyone was excited about the idea of using women in the Navy.⁶⁴ The board energized the women, who all believed that this was their chance to prove that women could live up to the same expectations as men. If they could win support for legislation authorizing the use of women, it would mean that women would no longer be limited to traditionally female dominated positions such as teachers and secretaries. They now had the opportunity to aid their country in a time of crisis and in positions historically held by men. They would be defending freedom and helping to shape the history of the U.S. and its Navy.

The delegates who met in early 1942 to begin planning for the creation of the WAVES wanted first and foremost a strong foundation for building the organization. They did not want the WAVES to live up to the stereotype of women as helpless and hopeless. They believed that if the WAVES were to succeed in a man's world, then the women who entered this new world would have to be treated the same as men. This meant that they should receive equal pay for equal work, similar benefits in their working environment and fair punishment when the situation presented itself. Leniency and favoritism would only have angered the male sailors and made the job of integrating women into the Navy exponentially harder. As Commander Elizabeth Crandall later explained,

It was a lot of work, and it was fighting all the way, because, again some of these men would say, 'I couldn't punish my daughter for doing this.' And I'd say, 'yes, but you're going to make it harder on them because you're going to irritate the enlisted men, if the men are punished and the girl who is late for work or comes in in improper uniform, any of these things, if she is not held to the standards that you demand of the men, we're going to have trouble.'⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., 32.

⁶³ Godson, 110.

⁶⁴ Mildred McAfee, interviewed by John T. Mason, Jr., August 25, 1969.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Crandall, interviewed by Etta Belle Kitchen, July 18, 1970.

The Women's Advisory Council knew that if the WAVES were to receive the same treatment as the men, it would have to pick a director that would not settle for anything but equality. She needed to be tough yet fair and have experience working with young women. The Women's Advisory Council was looking for someone who could provide guidance and leadership to the young WAVES. The Council believed that McAfee had the qualities required to fill the position and asked her to accept the position of director.⁶⁶ She was a perfect fit. The experience and expertise she had obtained at Wellesley College had given her the background required to successfully fill the position. "She was a gracious lady, she really was. Very bright, and I think that's why so many of the Wellesley graduates admired her and followed her into the Navy," remembers one WAVE.⁶⁷

Although its first director had been secured, legislation authorizing women in the Navy still had not been achieved. In a continued effort to win support for legislation permitting the use of women in the Navy, Gildersleeve and Harriet Elliot, dean of women at the University of North Carolina, wrote letters to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt arguing for the recruitment and enlistment of women into the Navy. They knew that the President respected the opinion of his wife and if they could convince her, they very well could win his support too. The plan worked, and on June 16 Knox notified Rear Admiral Jacobs that the President had given him his support. "Perhaps it was that Mrs. Roosevelt (whose counsel the president highly respected) and his secretary of the Navy were speaking in concert, or perhaps it was those words that carry such added weight in wartime, security and discipline, but for whatever reason, the president changed his mind."⁶⁸ Shortly after the President's announcement supporting the creation of the WAVES, the Senate Naval Affairs Committee changed its view, deciding to support the use of women in the Navy. The bill then passed through Congress and was officially signed into law by President Roosevelt on July 30, 1942.

As directed by Congress, McAfee was commissioned with the rank of Lieutenant Commander, the highest rank within the WAVES. For McAfee, her new position brought excitement as well as uncertainty. She was thrilled to be participating in the war effort and helping to expand the possibilities for women, yet she was unsure of which direction she needed to head in. As she began piecing together

⁶⁶ McAfee.

⁶⁷ June Nesbitt Gibbs, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, March 26, 1996.

⁶⁸ Ebbert and Hall, 35.

an organization of women, she was confused and uncertain of what she needed to do to get things started. Rear Admiral Jacobs notified McAfee that this was her ship and that its course would be determined by her. She was in charge and would take responsibility for the WAVES' successes and failures. For McAfee, her new position was "a case of standing by and seeing what hit me."⁶⁹ She had no naval experience to rely on and was faced with the monumental task of building an organization of women under the pressure of a war and a skeptical audience. Challenges were present from the start for McAfee. She had to figure out the best way to quickly enlist the help of enough women to get the organization started. In addition to getting enough women, she had to find jobs for them. While the Navy knew it needed the help of women, it was unclear where the help was needed most. It was up to McAfee and her small team to identify where help was needed most. "My first assignment, my first responsibility, was this business of just getting enough women there to start doing something, and what they were to do was as vague to me as it was to all the rest of the Navy at the time."⁷⁰ Unsure of how to tackle the problem of integrating women into the Navy, McAfee decided that the best solution was to observe her surroundings and let everything fall into place. This is exactly what happened for McAfee and the WAVES. Constant observation allowed McAfee and her officers to identify where the Navy needed assistance the most, ultimately giving her a starting point.

Immediately after McAfee's commission, one hundred fifty other officers were commissioned. It was their job to help train the new recruits, provide guidance and leadership to the WAVES in its early stages of development and be the eyes and ears for McAfee, providing her with insight into what the Navy needed.⁷¹ Training for these new officers took place at Smith College in Northampton, MA, with an extension at Mount Holyoke College in nearby South Hadley. Their indoctrination was designed by the Navy and took two months to complete. "It was very fine for the Navy, because really Smith did come through with all this, but I was entertained by the fact that we took the alumnae house from Smith and several dormitories, as I recall it, and, of course, the inn in Northampton was turned

⁶⁹ McAfee.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jeanne M. Holm, ed., *In Defense of a Nation: Servicewomen in World War II* (Arlington: Vandamere Press, 1998), 60.

over to the Navy.”⁷² It was here that the Navy would build and train its force of women officers with constant drilling and marching.

The requirements established for women joining the WAVES were strict, sometimes going too far. Initially it was not uncommon to hear about women failing their medical exams because they were held to the same expectations and requirements as their male counterparts. “One took quite literally the notion that the WAVES were to replace men, insisting that female recruits meet the height and weight requirements established for men. Only a few such women could be found, and according to McAfee they were ‘amazons, superb looking women.’”⁷³ Although cases like this were eventually worked out, it represents the confusion and uncertainty experienced by the Navy early on. Once worked out, the requirements for women officers and enlisted WAVES were similar, although small differences existed. Upon enlisting in the Navy, officers had to be between the ages of twenty and forty-nine, have a college degree or two years of college plus two years of business experience, be a U.S. citizen, pass a Navy physical examination, and have healthy teeth and gums, vision of 12/20 in each eye and be a minimum height of five feet and a minimum weight of ninety-five pounds. Additionally, they could not have dependents under the age of eighteen and needed to obtain references. Like officers, the women who were accepted into the WAVES as enlisted personnel had to meet several requirements. They had to be U.S. citizens between the ages of twenty and thirty-six, without dependents under the age of eighteen, have two years of high school or business school experience, pass a Navy physical examination, be five feet tall and ninety-five pounds, and have a minimum vision of 6/20. Any woman that met these requirements was encouraged to apply for the WAVES. Those who were interested needed to write to the nearest Office of Naval Officer Procurement and ask for a WAVES application and include their age, education, marital status, and number of dependents. If a woman qualified, an application for the WAVES was immediately mailed to her. If the application was accepted, she was asked to report for an aptitude test, interview and physical examination.⁷⁴ It was necessary that women be physically fit and competent for entry into the WAVES.

⁷² McAfee.

⁷³ Ebbert and Hall, 58.

⁷⁴ Nancy Wilson Ross, *The WAVES, The Story of the Girls in Blue* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), 169-171.

As expected, initial recruiting was slow as the WAVES struggled to gain solid footing in its new world, but by the end of the war, the early requirement of 10,000 women had grown to 100,000.⁷⁵ Those who thought the WAVES would fail were shocked as the demand for women continued to increase. To meet the high demand, the U.S. Naval Reserve opened up several facilities where women could apply for the WAVES. The main stations were located in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Richmond, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., but other smaller recruiting facilities dotted the country.⁷⁶

Upon being accepted into the WAVES, women immediately were sent to boot camp to receive training. The first influx of WAVES was sent to the University of Iowa at Cedar Falls, but soon the Navy realized that it needed to be able to accommodate a larger number of women. In February 1943 the Navy opened up Hunter College in New York City, affectionately called the USS Hunter by the WAVES, as a training station for enlisted women. Seventeen hundred women arrived every six weeks for training. It was here that WAVES were first introduced to the Navy and its way of life.⁷⁷

For many of the enlisted women, the first few days at Hunter were difficult, challenging them both physically and emotionally. "Sometimes we did not like the grim hours, the discipline, the hard work, but almost to the woman, we resolved to stick to it without audible griping."⁷⁸ The constant drilling, memorization, and other training left many of the new recruits exhausted. "I think the first day or two, for most of them, was a perfectly appalling experience when suddenly they lost their identity and became just a member of this squad or that squad, but they very shortly got into the idea that this enhanced their own importance," explained McAfee.⁷⁹ The women were not accustomed to regimentation, yelling or the strict discipline that the Navy demanded. Alsmeyer explained,

The sergeant called us 'clowns' and 'bucketheads', or more earthly terms, but took seriously his job of teaching us to muster on the double, dress right, march in precision. Our lives changed from an obscurely defined role in the civilian world where we grew up, into a rigidly defined role in a completely different world. The sergeant shouted and yelled, then mumbled

⁷⁵ Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, eds., *We're in This War, Too* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 29.

⁷⁶ Holm, 64.

⁷⁷ Holm, 64.

⁷⁸ Marie Beth Alsmeyer, *The Way of the WAVES: Women in the Navy* (Conway, AR: Hamba Books, 1981), 13.

⁷⁹ McAfee.

under his breath. He counted cadences and moaned, waving his hands in anguish. We marched and marched, and he yelled and yelled.⁸⁰

These new experiences frightened many of the women, but it did not take long for them to adjust. Once they understood the importance of their mission, they became passionate about it, enjoying it and yearning for more experiences.

The daily routine was strenuous, beginning at 0615 hours and ending at 2200 hours. It began with a wake up call, followed by breakfast, room inspection, two recitation periods, inspection, drill, physical education and then lunch at 1200 hours. After lunch, recruits were given time to study and then expected to attend two more recitation periods and recreation. Dinner was held from 1745 hours to 1830 hours and the evening ended with a study period, lecture session and taps.⁸¹ While in training, it was expected that women would learn naval history, naval regulations, how to properly identify ships and aircraft, how to write and how to march and assemble. To ensure that the women were progressing through each indoctrination period, tests were frequently given and it was expected that they pass. The women of the WAVES looked forward to each day of training with excitement and anticipation. "You know, we lived in these big apartment buildings, and you came all the way down six flights of stairs to muster out in the middle of the street on a damp morning, a rainy morning. It was a lot of fun. It was an adventure," remembers White.⁸²

Training not only helped the WAVES understand naval history and regulations, but it encouraged them to push their limits. They wanted to be the best and to prove to themselves and everyone else that they belonged in the Navy. "We were all simply astonished at the way they went for it. Of course, the marching, the drilling and things, they loved," remembered McAfee.⁸³ It made them feel as if they were a part of something important. In her memoir, Alsmeyer remembered what she gained from her boot camp experience.

The days marched by as seasons come and go, and Boot Camp came to an end. I thought of that frightened country girl from Texas, who, after four grimy days on the train, was gently kneaded, molded and shaped like clay into a WAVE, bursting with knowledge about ships and craft, armaments and BuShips and BuDocks. I could tell sea stories of naval history, and our platoon could march with the best of them. I knew I was a part of a quarter of a million women who had chosen to serve in a branch of the service during World War II. I was

⁸⁰ Alsmeyer, 14.

⁸¹ Ross, 12.

⁸² Luisa Costagliola White, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, November 6, 1996.

⁸³ McAfee.

healthy, eager and almost sixty inches tall, full of excitement as I looked forward to my next assignment. It was truly the best of times.⁸⁴

Her time spent at Hunter had given her everything that her hometown of Falfurrias could not. It had given her a taste of what the world had to offer and expanded her horizons beyond her wildest dreams. She met girls from all over the country, learned about the history of the Navy, and saw New York City for the first time in her life. It was these new experiences that taught her what life truly had to offer. Falfurrias offered security and comfort, but it limited what she could do with her life. She now understood that she did not have to limit herself simply because she was a woman. White felt the same way about her experiences at Hunter. It had molded her into a confident woman. "This was the thing about the service. You learned to stand on your own two feet, and you learned to get along with other people," she remembered.⁸⁵ In order to succeed in the WAVES, you had to learn to adjust. If one could not learn to live with others in tight quarters, follow instructions, or keep up with the physical demands of training then failure was inevitable. It was this training that would mold and shape the women at Hunter into perfect WAVES. Their training at Hunter would last only six weeks, but what they acquired from it would last a lifetime.

The training that the women received at Hunter was instrumental in helping them identify their individual strengths and weaknesses and in coming together as a unit. The drilling and lessons, however, were not the only critical components required for uniting the WAVES. The uniforms also played a significant role in unifying the women. Designed by Mainbocher, a leading fashion designer at the time, the uniforms made women feel as if they were part of a large group. They were to be kept clean and all metals were to be polished. Officers were required to have four sets of different uniforms. They were required to have a service dress blue that consisted of a navy blue jacket, shirt and hat, black gloves and black shoes and a white shirt. A second set of dress blue was required, but instead of a blue hat and black gloves, it had a white hat and gloves. The third set was the service dress white which included a white jacket, shirt, hat, shoes and gloves. The fourth uniform consisted of a gray dress, jacket and hat and a black tie and shoes. Enlisted women also had four different sets of uniforms. The first set of service dress blues included a navy blue jacket, skirt, hat, shirt and tie and black shoes and

⁸⁴ Alsmeyer, 24.

⁸⁵ White.

gloves. The second set of navy blues was the same as the first set except it had a navy blue and white hat and white gloves. The dress white uniform was made up of a white jacket, skirt, shirt, shoes and gloves and a navy blue and white hat. The last uniform required of enlisted women was made up of a gray dress, jacket and hat and a black tie and shoes.⁸⁶

While the uniforms varied depending on rank and title, they provided a sense of belonging. It did not matter that the WAVES came from different parts of the country or different religious backgrounds. What mattered now was that they were all wearing the same uniform and fighting for the same causes. According to Ross:

Undoubtedly the same uniform being worn by thousands of women helps to create a group spirit which, among those engaged in boring yet essential tasks, is not always easy to establish and maintain. The group idea is not an easy one for women to acquire. They are competitive and ambitious in a way more common to women than to men, and somewhat difficult to analyze. The wearing of the same clothes, day after day, creates within them an unconscious acceptance of themselves as a part of an organization concerned with a task greater than the ambitions of any one member. A uniform, then, does carry with it an important symbolic force.⁸⁷

The purpose of the uniform was to keep the WAVES focused on the task at hand. It kept them functioning as one unit and instilled in them a sense of pride and belonging. "It was an excellent, excellent, feminine-looking uniform, dark blue with the white shirts and very trim looking," remembers White.⁸⁸ The women who enlisted in the WAVES were eager to wear the uniform and to show it off. They took pride in cleaning the buttons each day and in making sure that everything about their uniform was perfect.

The women who were privileged enough to wear the WAVES uniform were expected to comply with the Navy's strict dress codes. Officers and enlisted personnel were required to provide themselves with the correct uniform and wear only their uniform with appropriate insignia, rank, or corps. This allowed others to easily identify rank, corps or rating. Until released from the Navy, the WAVES were expected to keep their uniforms clean and were required to wear them unless they were exercising or at home with no more than three guests present. Jewelry and other personal decorations were not to be worn on the outside of the uniform. Those who were suspended from the WAVES were

⁸⁶ Naval Historical Center, "Uniform Regulations, Women's Reserve, United States Naval Reserve, 1943," <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq59-22.htm>. December 15, 2007.

⁸⁷ Ross, 130.

⁸⁸ White.

prohibited from wearing their uniform until the punishment had been served.⁸⁹ There were no exceptions to these rules.

In spite of its limited resources and experiences, the WAVES were able to become operational and self-sufficient quickly, a monumental accomplishment. Most women, with the exception of those who had served during World War I, had no naval experience. Despite this extreme adversity, the WAVES were expected to become functional quickly and in the face of pessimistic sailors that did not necessarily want women serving and a public that expected its women to care for the country's children and not march off to war. Despite these challenges, the WAVES were able to use past experiences and knowledge to achieve a foundation on which to grow. By the time the war ended three years later, the WAVES had become so successful that 86,000 women had relieved men for duty at sea.

⁸⁹ Naval Historical Center, "Uniform Regulations, Women's Reserve, United States Naval Reserve, 1943," <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq59-22.htm>. December 15, 2007.

I JUST WANTED TO BE WHERE THE ACTION WAS

The women who joined the Navy as officers and enlisted personnel were a diverse group. They came from all parts of the country and joined for many reasons. Officers ranged in age from twenty to forty-nine while enlisted women ranged in age from twenty to thirty-six, although those included in this research were mid to late twenties. These women were also well educated. At minimum enlisted WAVES had high school diplomas and officers had Bachelor's degrees, although many had earned Master's degrees by the time they joined the Navy. Until October 1944, all WAVES were white. Like their backgrounds, their reasons for joining the Navy were diverse. Many had brothers and fathers who had served and thus felt a direct connection to the Navy. Some enlisted to help bring their brothers, fathers, boyfriends, and husbands home early and safely. Whether women packed parachutes, taught pilots in the Link trainers or maintained aircraft, they felt that they were doing all that they could to help bring their loved ones home safely. Others were looking for new experiences. The Navy spelled adventure and a way to serve their country. Some had never left home and were eager to experience the thrills of serving and to travel to parts of the country that they had only heard of in newspapers and magazines. Others felt an overwhelming sense of patriotism. They believed that it was their turn to serve their country. Despite their eagerness to serve, many had never left home before and were nervous about the challenges and uncertainties that the Navy offered. While everyone supported the war, not everyone believed that women belonged in the military. Racism and sexism sometimes made the Navy a cold and unfriendly environment to work in. Discrimination took on many forms and the WAVES had to learn to adjust. Eager to do their part for the war, women accepted the challenges and responsibilities and flooded the recruiting stations to sign up.

Regardless of why they joined, many were understandably nervous about joining the WAVES. Some had never left their hometowns, traveled by rail or air or visited a large city such as New York City. Quoting Charles Dickens', *A Tale of Two Cities*, Alsmeyer remembered it as "the best of times and the worst of times." One day Alsmeyer was a small town girl in southern Texas and the next day she was on a train heading for New York City. "I feel as if I am swinging at the end of a pendulum, suspended from a fixed-point but free to swing from the part of my life in a small South Texas town to a

tiny speck in 5,000 WAVES at Boot Camp on the campus of Hunter College in the Bronx.”⁹⁰ It truly was as if she was swinging on a pendulum, her emotions on a rollercoaster ride as she left Texas for the big city. “Would I miss this flat, sandy country full of scrub mesquite, javelinas and bull snakes? Was the whole world waiting for me? Where was I going with this dog tag number 57-489-00.”⁹¹ Having never left the comfort of Falfurrias, she was unsure of what to expect. Everything about Falfurrias was familiar and safe, and understandably she was nervous about leaving her secure world behind. Women like her were trailblazers, exploring an unfamiliar and predominately male world. “Near Indianapolis I moved the time on my watch up an hour and lost the first hour of my life while the train rolled through countryside so different from South Texas.”⁹² Dorothy Midgley remembers how she became very homesick shortly after leaving her family in New York for the WAVES. “It was just that I was very, very homesick at the very beginning, and my mother and sister were living in the Catskills at the time. It was only about 50 cents for a phone call so I called home every night where they were living.”⁹³ Fifty cents was a substantial amount of money for a phone call during the war so it is quite evident that Midgley missed her family tremendously. Although WAVES missed their families and friends, the training enabled them to focus on the task at hand. At each corner they turned, they were presented with new and exciting experiences. Although sometimes scared of not knowing what new experiences the Navy would bring, the idea of new adventures attracted many women to the WAVES.

Mary E. Hawthorne joined the WAVES because she wanted to be where the action was: socially and professionally. She had been teaching biology classes and labs for several years and was immediately intrigued by the military. She was excited to do her part, to be where the action was and to be near the men. After learning of the WAVES, she quickly signed up and was assigned to the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, FL, where she worked as an aviation physiologist training pilots in oxygen indoctrination and survival at sea. During World War II, aircraft were not pressurized and therefore pilots were required to use oxygen masks in order to survive above 10,000 feet. “So what we did was we taught them the scientific biology of why they had to put on the mask. Then we took them into the

⁹⁰ Marie Beth Alsmeyer, *The Way of the WAVES: Women in the Navy* (Conway, AR: Hamba Books, 1981), 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹³ Dorothy R. Midgley, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, February 7, 1995.

low pressure chamber. That chamber had pressure pumps that would withdraw the oxygen. And we taught them when you feel the least sensation that's different, put on your oxygen mask." This training was part of every pilot's program, and without it they would have been unable to complete their high altitude flights. She helped train the men that would be flying missions against Germany, Italy, and Japan. She could see the results of her efforts and knew that every bit she did to train these men was contributing to the cause. The knowledge she instilled in the aviators enabled to them successfully complete their missions and brought them home safely so that mothers, wives, and daughters could once again enjoy their company.

Hawthorne's assignment in Pensacola was short lived as she was quickly reassigned to Hunter. At Hunter she was tasked to setup the Navy Rehabilitation Training Center which provided assistance to health professionals.

We brought them in, many of them already had their stripes on. Third class, second class, in fact, we even had some first class corp WAVES that came in and took this training, so we didn't have to teach them a lot. We could concentrate on the specialty. We had at that time four specialties: occupational therapy assistant, physical therapy assistant, rehabilitation of the blind and rehabilitation of the deaf.

Hawthorne remained at the Naval Rehabilitation Center until August 1945 and then transferred to St. Albans Hospital on Long Island where she was the assistant rehabilitation officer. As the assistant rehabilitation officer, she was responsible for scheduling patients who required physical therapy. It was here that she would finish up her tour as a WAVE.

Almost sixty years after leaving the WAVES, Hawthorne is able to look back on her years of service knowing that the Navy gave her the opportunity to challenge herself physically and mentally and taught her what life had to offer. "I can say that I feel that the Navy gave me ample opportunities and challenged my talent, my wit, and my knowledge and skills to the extent that they could be challenged until I was satisfied." Designing the Navy Rehabilitation Training Center would have been a challenge for anyone. It required patience, knowledge, skill and cooperation. These tasks, sometimes larger than what many women were accustomed to, instilled confidence. They learned that they could stand on their own two feet.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Mary E. Hawthorne, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, August 24, 1994.

Like Hawthorne, Luisa Costagliola White joined the Navy to do her part for the war. She believed that the war was her responsibility and duty to enlist. She admired the courage of her brothers and wanted to experience the Navy with them instead of living vicariously through them. White enlisted and in May 1944 boarded a train for Hunter College. After completing boot camp at Hunter, she was sent to Atlanta, GA, to study navigation and the intricacies of the Link trainer, a World War II flight simulator. Training lasted ten weeks and consisted of navigation and astronomy courses. It was also required that she learn all the ins and outs of running the Link, including set up, operation and assembly. After graduating from Atlanta, White received the rank of Specialist/T third class and was assigned to Naval Air Station, Lake City, FL.

Working closely with pilots, the WAVES formed tight, professional relationships with the men. When a plane went down, the loss was felt throughout the entire WAVES community. "If a plane went down, and they did, I won't say with what frequency, but we may have known the pilot or the gunners or the staff or whatever, and it was devastating to the whole base." It saddened the women when planes crashed and lives were lost. Helping to mold and shape these men into pilots, women like White watched them grow. The pilots also recognized the importance of the WAVES work. They were able to see that the WAVES were passionate women who took pride in their job and they did not question or isolate the women. Instead they accepted them as equals and mentors. "We were their teachers, and they were our students. They were anxious to have good marks and to do their best. I mean we were all - it sounds corny - but we were all working for the war effort, and this was part of their training. So they just took it in stride, and most of them with a smile on their face." As a result of this, White and her colleagues were allowed to grow and flourish.

Like so many other women, White was honored to have served in the Navy. Reflecting on her service career, she is able to recognize the role it played in her life.

I think it broadened me immeasurably. It redirected my life in a way that I found out I loved to travel. I married a man from South Carolina, so right there, you know, you immediately became allied with the South. And I found out that there's a whole section of the country that thinks differently, talks differently, and eats differently than anybody else. I mean hot versus cold bread. It goes on today. But, yes, it certainly did. And I knew this would happen. I remember thinking that, remember when I got on that train in 1944, I said this is going to change my life, and it did. But it was certainly an experience that I don't regret for a minute, that I enjoyed tremendously. Tremendously! And today when people say, wow, you were in the service! And, oh, thank you for

serving our country. I thought, gee, I almost did it for personal reasons, you know. Because I enjoyed doing it, as well as for the patriotic thing. I enjoyed doing it.

Her experience in the WAVES was a life altering event, teaching self-sufficiency, confidence, skills that she would never have learned in the civilian world and introducing her to friends that she would carry throughout her life. She met people from all over the country, including WAVES, pilots and eventually her husband.⁹⁵

June Nesbitt Gibbs joined the WAVES for patriotic reasons, believing that it was her responsibility to support the war effort. While attending Wellesley, she decided to take a training course in cryptography, not knowing that it would help lay the foundation for her Navy career. Shortly after completing the course, she followed her friends and enlisted in the Navy. Upon completion of her initial training, she was assigned to Washington, D.C. breaking German code. It was like trying to solve a giant crossword puzzle. It challenged the mind and satisfied her desire to do something unique and meaningful for the war. She knew that by deciphering German code, she was saving lives and ships in the Atlantic. It justified all that she had done up to this point - the physical training, studying, traveling, and the separation from family and friends. She was doing her part to help win the war.

Although Gibbs' job as a cryptologist was demanding, she also found time to escape from it, exploring new places and meeting new people. As a young woman, she was eager to travel and seek out new adventures. Her car gave her the mobility to do this. On weekends off, Washington, D.C., and the surrounding area offered site-seeing, recreation and plenty of young people. It was a chance to network and meet people from other parts of the country. "I can remember driving along and not thinking anything of picking up a couple of sailors to give them a ride. If they were walking and I was driving, I'd give them a ride. You felt very safe. You didn't feel threatened at all in Washington in those days."

Gibbs left the Navy almost six months after the war ended. She was not sad that she had to leave; instead she was grateful for the opportunities that it gave her.

I look back, and I am delighted I served in the Navy. And I still have a real affection for the Navy. I go over to the Navy Base for ceremonies and I'm very impressed. I just have great,

⁹⁵ Luisa Costagliola White, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, November 6.

great respect for naval officers and the Navy in general. I think it was an appropriate thing for me to do, as my first job out of college, and in those days, it was the appropriate thing to do to serve because of the war, and I'm very proud of it. I really am.

As a sailor she had experienced things that civilian life could never have given her. She had traveled, deciphered enemy code, met new and exciting people and learned that she could survive in a man's world.⁹⁶

Donna Beebe de Wildt grew up in Hibbing, MN, far from the sounds and smells of the ocean. Upon graduating from Duluth State Teachers' College in June 1942, de Wildt decided to teach high school. She was there briefly before joining the WAVES. Although her parents were surprised that she decided to enlist, they fully supported her decision. "I was up there in the woods nine miles from the Canadian border in eight feet of snow, and I don't think it occurred to anybody that I would pack my little bag and leave to go serve my country." With her degree from Duluth State Teachers' College, it was expected that she would seek a career as a teacher. She had other plans and in December 1942 enlisted in the WAVES. After six weeks of training at Cedar Falls, de Wildt was sent to aviation mechanics school in Memphis, TN, where she studied to become a mechanic. While at Memphis, she took classes in aircraft identification, construction, maintenance, design, and repair. As a mechanic, it was her responsibility to understand all the intricacies of the airplane. "We went to classes to learn all about the mechanical parts, what was expected of us, how we would operate it, what we were going to do, and we were being taught hands on in the hanger training." Working with the men, de Wildt learned how to change the oil in the planes, replace and repair parts and how to do an inspection.

After completing her training in Memphis, de Wildt was transferred to Livermore, CA, where she worked with cadets who were learning to fly. She worked with the flight crew to ensure that the planes were safe to leave the ground. She checked the fuel, warmed the engine, checked the plane for holes or tears and made sure that the propellers were not damaged. Once she had completed her inspection, she signed off on a check sheet certifying that the plane was safe to fly. If de Wildt had any doubts about the safety or reliability of the plane, she had the power to ground it until all issues could be

⁹⁶ June Nesbitt Gibbs, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, March 26, 1996.

resolved. She had the final word in whether or not a plane left the ground. It was her job to protect both the plane and pilot.

De Wildt's experience in the Navy shaped her life in ways that she had never dreamed of. Each day brought her new and exciting experiences. Things were never stagnant or boring. There was always something to do. "I think it made me a better person and broadened my horizons. I felt that I had done something very worthwhile. It probably helped me along the way to do a better job at whatever else I did. I consider it a valuable experience. I'm glad I did it." By joining the WAVES, she was contributing to a worthwhile cause and putting her talents to use. Had she stayed at home as her family and friends believed she would, de Wildt would never have experienced the thrill of travel or sounds and smells of an aircraft engine. "I also think it made it easier for me to lead my life in this big world. I have no idea of what I may have done had I stayed in a small town in the Midwest." It had taught her patience, confidence and how to stand up for herself.⁹⁷

Ruth Lovejoy Small joined the WAVES in May 1943 because she believed it was the right thing for her to do. After completing her training at Hunter, she was assigned to the naval air station at Corpus Christi, TX, where she trained as a parachute rigger. The procedure for packing a parachute was complicated and took tremendous skill and patience. Getting the correct fold was the most critical part, any wrinkles or incorrect folds could result in a parachute not opening properly or at all during a jump. Parachute riggers were also required to mend, repair and inspect parachutes that returned from the field. "They'd be wet and be in bad condition. We had to mend them. We had to dry them out and sometimes run the harness machine and fix the harnesses before they went back out again." In addition to packing and mending parachutes, WAVES at Corpus Christi were also given the opportunity to jump. Although she never jumped from the plane, she did go up on several flights and helped push her fellow WAVES out the door. She remembers that WAVES would often get to the door and freeze before jumping.

Although dedicated to packing parachutes, Small was not always working and managed to find time to enjoy herself and share experiences with other WAVES. During her weekends off, she visited San Antonio and walked around the Alamo, went to the opera and traveled south to Mexico. In

⁹⁷ Donna de Wildt, interview by Evelyn M. Cherpak, July 8, 1996.

addition to her travels, Texas offered other experiences. While traveling to Texas, she accidentally found herself sitting in the black section of the train. "Being brought up in my area in Boston, I didn't have a lot of problems with black people. And that's where we met, it was right there. We got on the train and we sat down and the black people asked us to move. We were in the black section."

Small's experiences in the Navy had shaped her life dramatically. As a child, she was unable to socialize and explore her interests because of her father's strict rules. By joining the Navy, she was allowed the freedom to experience life by facing new challenges and meeting women from all over the country. When the war ended, she acknowledged being eager to settle down and start a family, but was also upset about leaving the friends she had made. "It was sad leaving the girls. It was a family."⁹⁸

For Emily Stone Cocroft, the decision to join the Navy was easy. Her father had served in the Navy during World War I and her brother served during World War II, so it was a natural move for her after learning of the WAVES in the Providence newspaper. When asked why she joined the WAVES and not one of the other services, she remembers thinking, "Oh, well, we were much more interested in the Navy here. We were in Rhode Island and my family was Navy, not to mention the uniforms, of course. The whole thing sounded like a much more exciting and interesting set up." So in 1942 Cocroft went to Boston to sign up for officer training. Told that she would have to wait for an officer training class because they were all full, Cocroft decided to sign up anyway as an enlistee. After taking an oath, she was put on a train to Madison, WI, where she trained at the radio school.

Training in Madison was four months long and included classes in typing, Morse code, radio and naval procedures and regulations. In addition to the book work, Cocroft remembers excessive marching and drilling and that she enjoyed it tremendously. "It was very interesting. Something new. I did like it. We marched around in that Wisconsin weather in the snow; it was very healthy." After four months of training, Cocroft was assigned to the Naval Air Station, North Island, San Diego, CA. While stationed at North Island she was kept busy routing messages for the Naval Air Station and its satellite bases. It was Cocroft's job to ensure that any messages that came in were properly routed and that any outbound messages were marked and forwarded to the proper recipient.

⁹⁸ Ruth Lovejoy Small, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, March 26, 2003.

Denied the opportunity to sign up for officer training when she initially enlisted, Cocroft finally received the chance in late 1944 when the Navy began accepting applications for officer training from those enlisted WAVES who had graduated from college. After being accepted in November, Cocroft traveled to Smith where she was one of the last to pass through the program before the war ended. Training was easy for her after having already spent time in the Navy. "Well, it was really quite much of a repeat of Wisconsin, except for coding. We had to learn how to operate the coding machines, which were classified. And we had to learn how to do that which, of course, we never did as enlisted personnel. How to be an officer, a lot of that." After four months of training at Smith, Cocroft was assigned to the communications headquarters for the 12th Naval District in San Francisco. Still in coding, she found the experience to be more hectic than her last assignment. Messages were constantly coming and going, and some were even at the Top Secret level. It was important work and Cocroft enjoyed it tremendously until she got out of the Navy in November 1945.

Cocroft enlisted in the Navy because of her family history. Both her father and brother had served so she felt obligated. She believed it would help enhance her life and was eager to experience the adventure that the Navy offered. "It was just a different experience and a different place and with that kind of discipline which was different from what I ever had at school. Just meeting different people and the excitement of being part of something big like that." Like so many others, she believed it was her chance to do something significant for the war effort and was very grateful that she had the opportunity to experience the Navy and all that it had to offer.⁹⁹

Eileen O'Conner worked as a yeoman during World War II and found serving in the Navy very rewarding. As a child in Jamestown, RI, she grew up surrounded by the Navy. Many of the officers stationed at the Naval War College lived in Jamestown and her brother joined the Navy in 1938. In addition, her mother worked for the Newport Daily News and often times reported on naval stories while her father was a master machinist at the Naval Torpedo Station located on Goat Island. Joining the WAVES was a natural choice for O'Conner. After taking her aptitude test and passing her physical in Boston, she was sworn in June 1943. "I was really looking forward to it," recalls O'Conner.

⁹⁹ Emily Stone Cocroft, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, September 24, 1996.

"I thought it was one of the great things of my life up to that point and it still is the greatest thing in my life." On June 15, 1943 she packed her bags and began training at Hunter College.

While at Hunter, O'Conner thrived on the military lifestyle. She learned to love drilling and quickly began to develop a close relationship with her Navy family. Her highlight at Hunter came on a Friday afternoon when Eleanor Roosevelt walked into the lunchroom and took the time to speak with each person. "She was so lovely and so beautiful and gracious. She took her tin tray, went through the mess line, and sat down wherever she saw a seat and had lunch with us." At the conclusion of training, O'Conner was initially assigned to Yeoman School in Stillwater, OK, where she learned naval office procedures. After completing three months of training at Stillwater, O'Conner was assigned to the Family Allowance Section of the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington, D.C. and then transferred to the Secretary of the Navy's office until getting out of the Navy in May 1947.

O'Conner has very fond memories of the Navy. After being discharged, she went back to school before finally getting a job the Naval War College library in Newport, RI. Looking back on her time in the WAVES, she is grateful for her memories and experiences. When asked what opportunities the Navy gave women, O'Conner responded by saying, "I feel that the Navy life broadened a great many of the WAVES. Opportunities were many and responsibilities had to be met realistically...The WAVES learned responsibility." For O'Conner, it helped to expand her understanding of the world and made her a better person. It was the happiest time of her life.¹⁰⁰

Ruthe W. Boyea served in the WAVES during World War II as an officer, teaching other young WAVES who were just beginning their naval careers. She joined because she believed it was what her generation needed to do.

You have to realize, and you have to put yourself back into the period of time that we're talking about – every single healthy man I graduated from college with, every single healthy man I graduated high school with, and my fiancé all were going in the service. My brother-in-law, who had a baby and a wife, had no choice; he went into the army. My uncle gave up his job to go in the army. There has been so much change in the philosophy of young people since the days of World War II that it's hard to understand that this was something that we did, and we did willingly and with great spirit.

¹⁰⁰ Eileen O'Conner, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, February 24, 1993.

After graduating from Boston University with a degree in social work, Boyea accepted a position with the YMCA in Springfield, MA, as Program Director for a women and girls program. Boyea remained there until signing up for the WAVES in January 1943. After completing her officer training she was commissioned on March 3 and assigned to Hunter College.

While at Hunter, she worked in the barracks helping to train new enlisted recruits on the ways of the Navy. She helped get them to class on time, marched them to meals, inspected their rooms, and addressed whatever issues surfaced in the building. Her position as a leader exposed her to variety of difficult situations, many of which she was not initially prepared to handle.

One has to realize that these women came from every kind of a background that you can possibly imagine – from the most wealthy to the most poverty-stricken. They came from every district; they came from every geographical area. Now you're putting them all together in a building and sending them off to classes, marching them to mess halls, changing their lives, getting them into uniform and so forth. That's the kind of thing you were doing. You were handling whatever came up morning, noon, or night. I had some absolutely weirdo experiences, because I came from a protected Boston family who went to church three times a week. And here I am in an environment that includes everything that you can think of. I had never even heard of lesbianism. I had never heard of incest. I had never heard of date rape. It's hard to believe this, but remember I was a young thing, twenty-five years old. I'd never heard of any—All of a sudden I had many of these things thrust upon me and didn't know how to deal with them. How to comfort, how to help a woman through whatever mental anguish or emotional state, so that she could go the next day and proceed through the training and all that.

Although satisfied with her work at Hunter, Boyea was transferred to Charleston, SC, in March 1943 to help train new recruits. Sixteen months later Boyea was transferred to Glencoe, GA, and tasked with settings up and supervising recreation, welfare and physical educations programs for men and women.

Boyea retired from the Navy on October 25, 1945. She enjoyed her time tremendously and believed that her experience in the Navy helped define the path she chose later on in life. It provided her with the courage and strength to stand up for herself and for women. After being discharged from the Navy, she began to fight for women's causes.

Because after all these magnificent experiences and power and position, when I got out of the service, nada. When we got out of the service, we were expected to keep our mouths shut, go back, get married, have the babies, do the things, and so forth. And here I had years of wonderful training, great opportunities, power positions, all that kind of stuff. And then I was supposed to be perfectly satisfied going back and having babies.

Although she was excited about the idea of raising a family and acknowledged the importance of family to her life, she was not satisfied with the expectations people held after the war. She looked at the return of women to the house and feminine jobs as a step back and a terrible waste of resources. While her children were still young, Boyea returned to school and got a master's degree and then became a public school teacher. Still not satisfied, she continued to pursue her education and eventually accepted a teaching position at Central Connecticut State University. After retiring from teaching, Boyea explains how she became "the instigator, the dreamer, the person who developed, designed, inspired the development" of the Women's Center at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, CT. In addition, Boyea participated in the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women, where she encouraged women to explore who they were. Boyea's experience in the Navy was influential in helping her move through life. She was quick to point out that her success later in life was a direct result of her time spent in the Navy.

It allowed me to do some thing that I never would have done. I never ever would have gone back to college after the service. You know, I'd have been satisfied to be a housewife and take care of the babies and keep my mouth shut. But the Navy didn't allow me to do that. And so therefore I went back to college. I got more education. Then it allowed me to be in the League of Women Voters. It allowed me to put aside time for the American Association of University Women. It allowed me to know that there was something and that I could do it.

Her experiences in the Navy had taught her there was more to life than raising a family and instilled confidence, courage and the desire to work towards a better life for herself and for women. The Navy had enabled her to flourish and to seek roles that she might never have considered had she not joined the WAVES.¹⁰¹

Although the majority of women that served in the WAVES left believing the Navy had dramatically impacted their lives, other women did not share similar feelings. These women were eager to serve and do their part for the war, but were relieved when the war finally ended. Janet Coit Petrucci joined the WAVES for patriotic reasons believing that it was the right thing for her to do. Following in the footsteps of her brother and an aunt that had served as a Yeoman during World War I, Petrucci decided that she too needed to do something to help with the war effort so in May 1943 she traveled north to Boston and enlisted. After initial training at Hunter, she was sent to Dayton, OH, to receive

¹⁰¹ Ruthe W. Boyea, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, July 5, 2001.

additional instruction in Communications Intelligence. Once complete, Petrucci was assigned to Washington D.C. where she worked in communications helping to break Japanese code. The work was interesting, but often the women were prevented from learning too much about their assignments. She remembers being told that it was impossible for her or other WAVES to know what was being printed from the machines as that information was highly classified and jeopardized their safety. If spies learned that they had this knowledge, it would put the women in danger.

Although she had played an incredibly important role in the war, she did not feel that the Navy had shaped her life. After the war ended and she was discharged in November 1945, Petrucci returned to hairdressing. She acknowledged that it was a good experience, but that after the war old habits and ways quickly returned as men and women returned to their prewar roles. Although it did not dramatically change her life, Petrucci is glad that she had the experience and grateful for the women that she worked alongside. She had made some great friends and was sad that she was leaving them when the war finally ended. "You hate to lose your friends."¹⁰²

Elizabeth M. Carlson joined the WAVES in December 1942 because it offered something new and exciting. After only 28 days of training at Smith, Carlson was promoted to an ensign and sent to Radcliffe for additional training in accounting. After two months at Radcliffe, Carlson was assigned to the First Naval District headquarters at the Boston Navy Yard. Unlike many other WAVES, Carlson wanted to stay near home because it was familiar to her. She felt comfortable in the city and was not looking to travel to somewhere new. While at the Boston Navy Yard, Carlson worked for the disbursing officer paying those who wanted to be paid in cash, but after a year she was transferred to another job that she found more exciting and interesting. "And this was the interesting one and the one that I really liked. Because I paid for ship construction in the First Naval District. I paid companies like Bath Iron Works and Bethlehem-Hingham. And then the small boat builders. So that to me was a little more interesting—a great deal more interesting—than paying personnel." This new job had given her tremendous responsibility. Instead of dealing with personnel and their small pay checks, she was dealing with companies and incredibly large sums of money. For anyone, this would have been a tremendous challenge and responsibility.

¹⁰² Janet Coit Petrucci, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, March 20, 1998.

In December 1945 Carlson was discharged from the Navy. While the WAVES had been a valuable experience for her and she was glad that she did it, she was relieved that the war was over. She had experienced what the Navy had to offer, but was looking forward to beginning a new life. "I could have stayed in because they were very anxious to have accounting girls stay in. But naturally I was ready to start married life with Al Anderson in New Britain." Having gone to college and spent several years working before signing up for the WAVES, she had already learned to be independent and self-sufficient and did not feel that the Navy had helped her grow in any way.¹⁰³

While these women represent only a small percentage of the total number that joined the WAVES, their stories and experiences represent the tens of thousands of women that joined the Navy during the war. When the war ended these women had learned to stand on their own two feet and had discovered that they could survive in a world traditionally dominated by men. By the time the WAVES returned home, they were more confident and capable women. "I think I put my talents to use in a positive way, and I believe it made me a better person. It certainly broadened my horizons. I also think it made it easier for me to lead my life in this big world. I have no idea of what I may have done had I stayed in a small town in the Midwest," remembers De Wildt.¹⁰⁴ White also felt that the war had made her a more confident and independent woman. "You had to learn to stand on your own two feet on your own merits. And you have no family in back of you. You only have your education and your own thoughts and your own ideals and your own character."¹⁰⁵ Gibbs also believed that her naval career made her a more confident and independent woman. "Because it was the first time that I'd ever lived away from home...And I learned to cook, and I learned to change washers on a faucet."¹⁰⁶ They learned how to survive on their own, how to receive and give orders, to be self-sufficient and how to be independent thinkers.

While the experience of being a WAVE was generally positive and women gained valuable skills and a lifetime of memories, there were negative aspects too. Although many men gladly backed the dramatic changes that occurred in the Navy after the outbreak of war, others did not support the integration of women. Discrimination existed on many levels, some direct and some indirect. When

¹⁰³ Elizabeth M. Carlson, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, February 19, 2001.

¹⁰⁴ De Wildt.

¹⁰⁵ White.

¹⁰⁶ Gibbs.

the initial legislation for the WAVES was passed, the number of serving officers was capped, preventing many qualified women from serving as commanding officers. Initially the legislation permitted one lieutenant commander, thirty-five lieutenants and the total number of lieutenant junior grades could not surpass 35 percent of all commissioned WAVES officers.¹⁰⁷ In addition, early legislation prohibited WAVES from serving outside the continental United States. It was not until a survey was conducted that stressed the lack of naval support in Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico that the Navy considered the possibility of WAVES serving overseas. Finally in September 1944 the Navy conceded and WAVES were permitted to serve outside the forty-eight contiguous states. Early legislation also prohibited black women from joining the service. Although black men had been serving in the Navy as mess attendants and stewards for years, the Navy argued that it did not need black women to release these men for duty at sea. In December 1942 the chief of naval personnel drafted a letter to the Young Women's Christian Association arguing against the use of black women in the Navy. "At this time the Navy does not have any substantial body of Negro men available for general service at sea, [and] it has no occasion to replace Negro enlisted men with Negro enlisted women."¹⁰⁸ Finally in July 1944, Secretary of the Navy Forrestal suggested to President Roosevelt that black women be allowed to join and in October 1944, the Navy passed legislation authorizing black women to begin serving as early as January 1, 1945. Harriet Ida Pickens and Frances Will were sworn in and sent to Northampton for training. Despite the groundbreaking legislation, the response from black women was minimal and by the middle of 1945, only seventy-two black women reported to Hunter for training.

The Navy not only discriminated against black women, but also created policies directed at homosexual men and women. Policies directed at homosexual men existed in the Navy long before the outbreak of World War II, but with the inclusion of women into its ranks, the Navy decided to create new policies that targeted both homosexual men and women. Despite its urgent need for sailors and WAVES, the Navy still believed that homosexuality was wrong and that homosexuals who joined were

¹⁰⁷ Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the US Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 113.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Company, 1993), 84.

psychopathic, careless and menaces to society. In an effort to reclaim what the Navy felt were lost sailors, it came up with three categories for properly removing or retraining homosexuals. There were the major criminals that would face trial, those that were considered mentally ill and would be discharged from the Navy and those that were viewed as minor criminals capable of being recouped.¹⁰⁹ However, partly due to the dramatic increase in the number of women serving and the military's desire to do something about the problem, by the time the war ended the military had come up with a single solution to target homosexuals. Instead of trying to reclaim homosexual sailors and WAVES, the Navy decided to discharge them.

But the most dramatic outcome of the new system was not humane – the widening of the net in which gay men and lesbians could be caught, vastly expanding the military's antihomosexual apparatus and creating new forms of surveillance and punishment. When previously only those men who had been caught in the sexual act and convicted in court were punished, now merely being homosexual or having such tendencies could entrap both men and women, label them as sick and remove them from the service with an undesirable discharge.¹¹⁰

Unfortunately for these sailors, it did not matter that they joined the Navy because of their deep patriotism or their eagerness to be part of something special.

Black, white, gay or straight, women found the Navy to be a cold and sometimes unwelcoming place. Nona Baldwin Brown was assigned to the Navy's Public Relations office. It was her duty to manage all press related issues that came through on a daily basis. She enjoyed her naval career and learned a lot from it, but believed that it limited her abilities. She felt that no matter how hard she worked, she would never be able to advance within the Navy because someone would always be willing to stand in her way. Her experiences in the Navy taught her that you could only push so hard before finally getting frustrated and giving in. "I think on the whole it was a good experience for me because I learned that I couldn't push further, faster, than someone else was going to allow me to do, but even The New York Times was more open than the Navy as far as that kind of advancement was

¹⁰⁹ Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 137.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

concerned.”¹¹¹ Having worked for The New York Times both before and after the war, she found that it was more accepting of working women and that more opportunity for personal growth existed.

Like Brown, de Wildt also experienced discrimination while serving. De Wildt enjoyed working relationships with male sailors, but found that they could be rude, relentless and annoying. She remembers thinking that sometimes she wanted to tell them to get lost and “go enlist in the Army.”¹¹² They mocked her for being a woman in a man’s world and made fun of the fact that she and other WAVES wore denim to work because it meant she was getting her hands dirty doing work typically assigned to men. “Oh, they kidded us about being women sailors and that we couldn’t do the work, and why did we join this man’s Navy? Some of them figured we joined up to find a good looking sailor to marry.”¹¹³ Although most WAVES have fond memories of their male counterparts, discrimination towards WAVES undoubtedly existed. The WAVES were working in a man’s world and their presence meant that sailors would have to face the realities of combat. This certainly made many young men angry and resentful towards and maybe even jealous of their replacements.

The most damaging form of harassment appeared in early 1943 when a slander campaign that included jokes, gossip and obscenities began to demoralize the military. Directed at women, it caused those that had already joined to become discouraged and convinced others who were considering enlistment to decide against it. “It was a humiliating and demoralizing experience for the thousands of women who had responded to what they had perceived as their patriotic duty.”¹¹⁴ Although directed primarily at the Army, it impacted all branches of the military and became so violent that the President and First Lady tried to contain the campaign. Initially it was suspected the enemy agents had infiltrated the country and had begun a propaganda campaign against the military, but an investigation later revealed that American servicemen had started the rumors. These men were angry and upset by the campaign to recruit women. They felt that the women were violating their space by joining a world traditionally dominated by men and believed that they were dying in combat because women were joining the military and sending them to the front lines. “In the machismo world of barracks humor,

¹¹¹ Nona Baldwin Brown, interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak, September 27, 1997.

¹¹² De Wildt.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Jeanne M. Holm, ed., *In Defense of a Nation: Servicewomen in World War II* (Arlington: Vandamere Press, 1998), 51.

where women and sex are a primary topic, military women had become fair game.”¹¹⁵ Although the campaign began to fade by mid-1943, the damage was done and the military began to see a drop in the number of recruits. Women had decided against submitting themselves to the harassment and slander that came with joining the military.

Despite the fact that most women view their naval experiences as positive, discrimination clearly existed. The positions that women could fill were limited, WAVES were prevented from serving outside the forty-eight contiguous states and black women were kept from the Navy until late in the war. The slander campaign had a devastating effect on the Army, although its impact on the Navy was minimal because women were already integrated. Yet harassment from male sailors sometimes made the experience of being a woman in a man's world difficult. Despite all this, most women still look at their time in the Navy as a positive experience. If discrimination existed, then why do most women overlook it? Maybe it is the fact that the war ended sixty-two years ago and those negative memories have been forgotten. It could be that these women are so proud of their naval service during the war that they have replaced those bad memories with fond ones. People have a tendency to remember the good and forget about the bad. There may be a desire to suppress those negative memories as they cause heartache and pain or simply women may not want to talk about these bad memories. Studs Terkel noted that the Japanese who were held as prisoners in the U.S. during the war did not want to discuss their imprisonment because they felt ashamed by it. “When shame is put on you, you try to hide it,” explained former prisoner Peter Ota.¹¹⁶ WAVES may have felt humiliated by the harassment received from male colleagues and did not want to discuss it after the war ended. Whatever the reason, WAVES look back on their years of service as a life-altering and positive experience.

The women who joined the WAVES did so for a variety of reasons. Some joined because they felt it was the proper thing to do, others were patriotic, some were eager to travel and experience new things, and still others joined because of the deep military tradition in their family. They came from all corners of the country and brought with them different levels of experience and education. Some

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹¹⁶ Studs Terkel, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32.

women had found work right out of high school, others had a college degree and some even had a master's by the time they joined the Navy. Upon joining, WAVES found the training difficult. Many also experienced moments where they missed family and friends. This was the first time away from home for some women. Despite this, the training proved to be a valuable experience for the women as it helped them understand their roles within the Navy and united them as a group. Regardless of their education, their reasons for joining, or their experience, most of the women that joined the WAVES discovered a new and exciting life. Travel, entertainment and exposure to new cultures and people offered WAVES a chance to experience the world outside their hometowns. Jobs as Link trainers, aviation physiologist, aviation mechanics, cryptologists, recreation specialists and yeoman provided the WAVES with skills that they would cherish throughout their lives.

DEMOBILIZATION AND THE PUSH FOR INTEGRATION

By the time the war officially ended on September 2, 1945, the WAVES had filled thousands of positions within the Navy, comprising two percent of uniformed personnel. In Washington D.C. the WAVES made up fifty-five percent of uniformed personnel at the Navy Department, seventy-five percent at the Navy's communication center and seventy percent at the Bureau of Naval Personnel.¹¹⁷ WAVES had stepped in during a time of crisis and were able to meet the Navy's needs better than anyone had anticipated. Although the program had been successful, men and many women were eager for a return to normalcy. Men wanted their jobs back and expected women to give them up. Many were also eager to see the Navy return to its traditional ways, so when it was clear that the war was all but over, the Navy began the process of discharging women from the service. By discharging many of its skilled and qualified WAVES, the Navy was left without much of its administrative support, handicapping its ability to perform effectively in the postwar. By the end of 1945, 21,000 of 86,000 women had left the Navy and returned to their old lives. By the spring of 1946, the Navy began experiencing another personnel shortage and asked its remaining WAVES to remain on active duty until July 1947, so that it could reevaluate its postwar needs. To its surprise, it discovered that it could not operate effectively without its WAVES. "From virtually every corner of the Navy Department clear messages were coming that the numbers of women needed, and the value placed upon their performance, made it no longer wise or feasible to rely on temporary, stopgap extensions."¹¹⁸ The Navy had finally recognized the value and significance of women and began a push for legislation incorporating women into the Navy on a fulltime basis.

In late 1945 McAfee was relieved of her position by Lt. Commander Jean Palmer and in February 1946, Commander Joy Bright Hancock was promoted to the assistant directory of the WAVES and ordered to the Bureau of Naval Personnel to assist with the creation of a proposal authorizing women to serve in the Navy on a permanent basis. "She based her work on two major premises: that, insofar as practical, women should fit into existing Navy structures and that they should

¹¹⁷ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Company, 1993), 89.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

serve not only in the regular Navy on a career basis but also in the active and inactive Naval Reserve.”¹¹⁹ Shortly after accepting her new position, Hancock conducted a survey and discovered that there still was a need for women in the Navy even though the war had ended. Based on her survey, roughly 1,400 officers and 9,500 enlisted WAVES were needed to meet the Navy’s postwar needs. Using her survey, Hancock and Captain Ira Nunn from the judge advocate general’s staff approached Carl Vinson, chairman of the House Committee on Naval Affairs, and argued that the Navy could not effectively operate without the support of women. Although Vinson did not support the permanent placement of women in the regular Navy because he felt that it was too dangerous, he agreed to propose legislation that would amend the initial bill that was passed in 1942. In May 1946 the Naval Affairs Committee met and heard arguments from Hancock, Vice Admiral Louis Denfeld and Rear Admiral Felix Johnson as to why women should become part of the regular Navy. They argued in favor of a bill authorizing the permanent placement of women in the regular Navy so that it could respond quickly in the event of another national emergency.¹²⁰ Those on the committee did not agree, citing the fact that senior women’s leaders had left the military after the war and that they had expressed concerns about women permanently serving in the military. Women like McAfee were concerned that women in the permanent Navy would not be warmly welcomed. They believed that women were accepted during the war because they were desperately needed and people were patriotic and willing to make exceptions while the country was locked in conflict. However, the war was over and women leaders were concerned that the country would digress and forget about the wartime contributions of WAVES and that those women who entered the peacetime military would face harassment and an unwelcoming environment. An atmosphere like this would discourage those already in the military and prevent others from ever joining. In addition, the House Naval Affairs committee believed that the WAVES had been accepted in the Navy only because they had been needed so desperately during the war and now that the war was over there was no longer a need for women. Due to these concerns, the proposed legislation faded.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 103.

¹²⁰ Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the US Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 161.

¹²¹ Ebbert and Hall, 103.

Although the bill died, its supporters did not give up. Shortly after the initial push for legislation failed, it was again brought to the table when Hancock relieved Palmer as director of the WAVES in June 1946. Hancock recruited Commander Bess Dunn, Lieutenant Command Winifred Quick Collins and Commander Louise Wilde to draft legislation for women in the Navy. In addition, Hancock sought the support of her male counterparts. She believed that if legislation authorizing women in the Navy on a permanent basis was to pass, then it must be seen as a Navy bill with the support of the Navy's men. Earlier legislation had failed because its main supporters were women and it was perceived by the House Naval Affairs Committee as a bill created by women without the full support of the Navy. She was able to convince Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague, chief of naval personnel, of the need for women in the Navy and he agreed to propose new legislation supporting this. In addition, Hancock traveled regularly to argue in support of women in the Navy on a permanent basis. She understood what it took to get things done in the Navy.

In an era of increased female submissiveness, Hancock was polite and deferential to these officers, but she unhesitatingly manipulated them to win their approval of her plans. She would get one opinion, then go to the next officer and say, 'Captain So-and-So thinks this is a good idea.' The officer would reply, 'Well, if the captain thinks so, I'll go along with it.'¹²²

Collins was also traveling regularly in an effort to win support for women in the peacetime Navy. When unable to convince men of the Navy's need for women in peacetime she decided to take a different approach, and asked those who opposed legislation to put their thoughts on paper so that they could be reviewed by the chief of naval personnel knowing that those who opposed the bill would not challenge the chief of naval personnel. To win the support of senior male officers, Hancock and Quick had to be creative and persistent. They changed their strategies when things did not work and ultimately were able to prevail, winning the support of key naval officers.

The drive for legislation took an unexpected turn when the passage of the National Security Act in early 1947 united all the armed services under the Department of Defense. Now the Army, Navy and Marines were all under the same umbrella. When news of the National Security Act reached Hancock, she knew immediately that if legislation allowing women to serve in the peacetime Navy was to pass, it would have to be coordinated with the Army and Marines. She quickly contacted WAC director Colonel Mary A. Hallaren and MCWR director Major Julia E. Hamblet and worked to draft

¹²² Godson, 163.

bills to present to the Senate Armed Services Committee in Congress on July 2, 1947.¹²³ Bills S.1103 and S.1157 proposed the establishment of a permanent presence of women in the Army, Naval Reserve, Navy, Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserve. When the hearings did begin, the women were ready. Testimonies from key military figures, including Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and Rear Admiral T.L. Sprague, made it clear that women in the armed services were essential to the efficiency and productivity of the United States Navy.

These men had seen first hand the potential of women. They had worked with them and could say confidently that the services they performed had a dramatic impact on the outcome of the war and that if the Navy and the military expected to retain its dominance in the developing Cold War world, then women would have to be part of it. They believed that the war had proved that women could play a vital role in the peacetime Navy and perform jobs that they had never been welcomed to before. At minimum, they argued that the Navy needed a small contingency of women on a permanent basis and a larger group that could quickly be called up should another crisis emerge. They felt that in the event of another conflict, women would again be needed and that the country would not have the luxury of starting another woman's program. "Some who admit that the WAVES will be essential in war, argue that in time of peace they should be retained in the Reserve and not in the regular Navy. If that argument were valid, all the armed services could be maintained in a reserve status only," argued Vice Admiral Donald B. Duncan. Every part of the Navy should maintain a strong nucleus of men and women so that it could quickly mobilize in the event of another crisis. In addition, they argued that women brought skills to the Navy that were different from their male counterparts and that their services would be valuable not only during wartime, but also in peace.

It is the considered opinion of the Navy Department and my own personal belief that the services of women are needed. Their skills are as important to the efficient operation of the Naval Establishment during peacetime as they were during the war years...The WAVES are no longer an experiment. They have become an integral part of the Navy. At the same time they have brought an efficiency and refinement to the service which we cannot afford to lose, explained Nimitz.¹²⁴

¹²³ Ibid., 163.

¹²⁴ U.S. Senate, Committee on the Armed Services, *Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1947*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, Government Printing Office.

Rear Admiral W.A. Buck, Chief of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts also argued that women were needed because they bring new skills to the Navy that men cannot provide.

During the last war the naval supply, accounting, and fiscal functions, for which the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts is responsible, would not have been so well performed had it not been possible to fill many billets related to those functions with commissioned and enlisted women of the Naval Reserve. Their services in accounting, stock control, disbursing, clothing and small stores, ship's stores, statistical, planning, cataloging, mess operation, nutritional research, and in many other supply duties contributed in large part to getting the supplies where required, on time.¹²⁵

He found that women did not tire easily and were often able to outperform men in tasks that were repetitive. Rear Admiral Earl E. Stone also felt that women had earned a place in the Navy due to their patience, reliability and dedication. "WAVE officers proved themselves more capable, patient and painstaking than male officers in the continued performance of important but tedious code room work and in certain types of cryptanalytical work."¹²⁶ Not only were these women effective, but were able to maintain a hard work ethic for longer periods of time than men. They believed that women were competent sailors that were equally as efficient as men and sometimes better for certain jobs. They brought new skills and ideas to the Navy and therefore should not be overlooked.

The testimonies of these men were an important contribution to the push for legislation. They had witnessed first-hand the competence, capabilities, persistence and dedication of the WAVES. They knew that women were capable sailors and that their services would be needed should another war occur. As naval officers, they knew that the Navy would have to rely on women if it expected to remain effective in the postwar and should another war break out, the Navy would not have the luxury of building another woman's program. They had proved too valuable an asset during World War II.

Although many supported making women a permanent part of the Navy, there were others who questioned the legislation that would authorize a permanent place for women. There were concerns about women getting pregnant and serving on combat ships. The impact of menopause on women was the biggest concern for Senate Armed Services committee members, who questioned a woman's ability to perform effectively during this stage in her life. Senator Leverett Saltonstall from Massachusetts asked whether or not women would become incapacitated during menopause and if so,

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

would the military have to discharge them. A statement from the Surgeon General of the Navy explained that women would not become incapacitated and would be physically able to meet the requirements of the Navy. "The commonly held idea that many women are invalidated in their middle years by the onset of the menopause is largely a popular fallacy...The average professional woman is well-balanced mentally and physically and this normal involutational physiological change occurring in late middle life is usually passed with little or no serious disability or residual effects."¹²⁷ In addition, the concerns about pregnancy and women serving on ships were quickly extinguished when it became clear that the proposed legislation would discharge women from the service in the event of a pregnancy and that women would only be allowed to serve on hospital ships. Finally on July 15, 1947 the Senate Armed Services Committee agreed to support legislation authorizing women a permanent place in the U.S. military and then a week later the Senate passed the bill.¹²⁸

After the bill passed in the Senate, it was sent to the House Armed Services Committee where resistance was fierce. Over the course of eight months committee members debated whether or not women should have a permanent place in the military, eventually deciding on reserve status only. It was argued that more studies needed to be done before women should be allowed a permanent place in the U.S. military. Deciding that it was better to have something than nothing at all, women's leaders were ready to accept the committee's decision, believing that if they continued to push, the bill in its entirety would be dropped and women would lose all that they had gained. When Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith heard of the committee's decision, she immediately contacted W.G. Andrews, the committee's chairman, and said that it was all or nothing. "There is no such thing as a service career for a Reservist."¹²⁹ On March 23, 1948 the full Armed Services Committee met to vote on the legislation. Since Chase could not attend, she asked her proxy to vote for the integration of women into both the regular services and reserves and against the integration of women into the reserves only. By a margin of twenty-six to one, the legislation was defeated. Chase's decision to stand by herself won the respect of her colleagues and when the bill appeared on the House floor again in April, it was rejected by a count of fifty-four to forty-two. Seeing how close she was, Chase contacted Secretary of Defense

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Margaret Chase Smith, *Declaration of Conscience* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 87.

James Forrestal and asked for his help. Forrestal contacted committee members and expressed his support for women in the military on a permanent basis. Pressure from Forrestal and other military leaders forced the House Armed Services Committee to reassess the bill. On June 12, the Senate and House approved the bill giving women a permanent place in the military.¹³⁰ Then on July 30 President Harry Truman signed the Integration Act, officially allowing women to begin serving in both the Naval Reserve and the Regular Navy.

The Navy's first recruits after the passage of the Integration Act came from those who had remained on active duty throughout the demobilization period. Next former WAVES were encouraged to apply, and in September 1948 the Navy began a campaign to recruit new women. New recruits that applied to the Navy shared similar backgrounds as their predecessors. These women came from all over the country, had various levels of education and had a mixture of life experiences to bring to the Navy. They applied for patriotic reasons, adventure, careers, challenges and freedom from the pressures at home, all similar motives as their predecessors only a few years earlier.¹³¹

Training for these new recruits was significantly easier after the experiences of World War II as the Navy knew what to expect from its women and understood what the training needed to focus on. As a result, training for new enlisted recruits at the Naval Training Station at Great Lakes, IL, was more focused and organized than the training received by the WAVES during the war. These women were taught about naval traditions, customs, history, discipline, physical well being, responsibility, manners and morals. In addition, women were taught about the Navy's role in the country and their own individual roles and significance within the Navy. After completing their training at Great Lakes, enlistees were either assigned to specialized training schools or were sent directly to their duty stations.¹³²

While training for enlisted women began shortly after the passage of the Integration Act, recruiting for officers did not begin until later as the Navy initially relied on its experienced pool of WAVES to help make the transition. Finally in May 1949, the first class of officers graduated from a five month indoctrination period at the naval base in Newport, RI. Like the training for enlisted

¹³⁰ Ibid., 89-96.

¹³¹ Ebbert and Hall, 118.

¹³² Ibid., 120.

women, training for new officers was easier the second time around. Officer candidates studied naval history, traditions, customs, discipline, organization and communication. In addition the extended training classes taught physical fitness and leadership to officer candidates. "They learned to drill, and daily swimming classes were mandatory. They also stood watch and took turns as platoon leaders and company commanders."¹³³ The Navy had to ensure that its new officers had the experience and skills necessary to lead a new and exciting journey for its enlisted women.

Although women had proved useful during the war in a variety of positions and had been accepted into the Navy on a permanent basis, it still was not perfectly clear what their new roles would be. This was the peacetime Navy and things were different from during the war. In early 1949 a committee was created to determine what jobs women could perform in the peacetime Navy. It was established that women's services were desperately needed in more than half the Navy's ratings. A sample of those ratings determined to be critical were aviation electronicsman, aviation electronic technician, aviation storekeeper, communications technician, aerographer's mate, machine accountant, yeoman, radioman, storekeeper, parachute rigger, air controlman, instrumentman and draftsman. Despite the study others were not convinced and began a proposal to limit women to a handful of ratings. Although the Navy did not acknowledge the proposal, women began being transferred into positions that were considered more traditional for them and as a result of the momentum, the number of technical and aviation ratings open to women began to decline.¹³⁴

Even though the number of ratings opened to women continued to fall after the passage of the Integration Act, it was still a huge accomplishment for women. For the first time in the nation's history women had entered a man's domain by the tens of thousands and had earned enough respect from their male counterparts that they were granted a permanent place. Women that decided to join the Navy now had the option of pursuing a military career. In addition, more opportunities for travel began to appear. In April 1949, the first group of officers reported for duty in London. Shortly after that, additional women were requested for duty stations in Paris, Rome, Guam, Alaska, Egypt and Germany. It was becoming clear to the Navy that it could not continue to limit its womanpower to the continental U.S. While women may have been limited in what positions they could fill, they had come a long way in

¹³³ Ibid., 122.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 125.

eight years. "As the second anniversary of the Integration Act approached, the Navy could be well satisfied with USS Nucleus. Navy women had opportunities for travel, training, and experience not available to most civilian women. There was now in place a well-marked path along which the ambitious, talented, enterprising, and industrious could move to higher positions and retire with a pension."¹³⁵ The Navy would again be tested in 1950 with the outbreak of war on the Korean Peninsula, and this time the nucleus of women was already in place. Within three years of the conflict, the number of women in the Navy would triple as the need for them continued to grow. To meet these growing needs, the minimum age was dropped from twenty-one to eighteen and the law requiring married women to leave the service was dropped.

The Integration Act was a milestone for the military. For the first time in the country's history, women were allowed the opportunity to serve in the naval reserve and the permanent Navy. Women could now seek naval careers and receive the same benefits as their male counterparts. The Integration Act was an acknowledgement by the military and the Navy of its need for women and of women's excellent service record during the war. It was a foundation to build on and set an example for the country, proving that women could perform just as effectively as men. Although a huge step forward, the Integration Act did have its restrictions. Initial legislation allowed women eighteen to twenty-one years of age to enlist in the Regular Navy only with parental consent. It limited the total number of enlisted women who could serve in the Regular Navy to two percent of enlisted strength and the number of commissioned officers to no more than ten percent of the total number of authorized women. It also limited the number of commissioned officers to five hundred and the number of enlisted women to six thousand for two years. In addition, it also restricted women from serving at sea or in foreign countries.¹³⁶ Despite these restrictions, it was still a monumental step forward and has forever changed the face of the Navy.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 126.

¹³⁶ U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1947*.

CONCLUSION

The women who entered the WAVES in 1942 had no idea of the challenges that awaited them or how their services in the war would change the face of the Navy. They were entering an institution historically dominated by men during a time of conflict. It was inevitable that they would meet resistance and they did. Many men rejected the idea of women serving in the military because they felt it was not the proper place for a woman and it meant that they would have to leave the comfort of their shore assignment for the hardships of the front lines. Although women were slated to serve only for the duration of the war plus six months, many men still felt threatened by the WAVES and believed that they belonged in the home or in jobs traditionally open to women. They felt the Navy was not an acceptable place for women, even in a time of crisis. The slander campaign in 1943 demonstrated men's desires to reclaim their male domain.

Initially the Navy asked for a small number of WAVES, but it soon realized that its need was greater and opportunities for women quickly expanded to areas where it had been believed women did not belong. Not only did these women meet the demands of the Navy, but they performed so well that the Navy continued to ask for more WAVES. By the time the war ended in September 1945, nearly eighty-six thousand women had served in the WAVES. These women came from a variety of backgrounds, joined for various reasons and performed jobs that many had never dreamed of. Jobs as Link trainers, aviation mechanics, cryptologists, parachute riggers, aviation physiologists and machine gun instructors offered WAVES new and exciting opportunities. When the war ended, these women had proved themselves capable of working in an environment historically dominated by men, and many continued serving in the years following the conflict as the Navy realized it would not be able to demobilize without the help of its women.

The passage of the Integration Act in 1948 was the beginning of a special relationship between women and the Navy. Despite the early restrictions, it would not be long before new opportunities began emerging. In 1971 the Navy formally announced that it would no longer forbid women from the service if they became pregnant while on duty or if they already had dependents. Then in 1977 the Navy began issuing uniforms that were specifically designed for those women that became pregnant. In

the spring of 1972 the Navy closed its training facility for women in Bainbridge, MD, and instead sent recruits to Orlando, FL, where they eventually began training alongside the men. In August 1972 Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo Zumwalt issued a statement in which he said that new policies would be created that would allow women to have the same opportunities as men in all naval ratings and that same year women began serving on non-combat ships and aircraft in small pilot programs.¹³⁷ It was not until 1978, however, that women officially began serving on non-combatant ships. Rear Admiral Deborah A. Loewer recalls the first time she stepped on a Navy ship in 1978: "The Captain looked at the four of us and said only these words, 'I didn't ask for women onboard. I don't want women onboard my ship.'" After 13 years of serving at sea, she stepped off her last ship to the sounds of "ding..ding, ding..ding" and the Bosn's pipe, both signs of respect for the veteran sailor.¹³⁸ Finally in 1994 women were granted the opportunity to serve on combat ships. In 1973 the military officially ended its draft program and as a result, was voluntary and could no longer rely on a draft to meet its needs. In October 1975 President Gerald Ford signed public law 94-106 which opened the service academies to women, resulting in the Naval Academy accepting its first 81 female midshipmen in July 1976. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Navy recognized the significant damage that sexual harassment was causing and began programs to educate its sailors in an effort to curb the verbal and physical abuse that women were still receiving despite almost five decades of naval service.¹³⁹ As a result of these new opportunities, women now comprise 15 percent of naval forces and can serve as aviation machinist's mates, structural mechanics, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, damage controlmen, cryptologic technicians, information systems technicians, surface sonar technicians, air traffic controllers and master-at-arms. The experiences and contributions of eighty-six thousand women during World War II had opened the Navy's eyes to the capabilities of women. The WAVES helped build a foundation that the Navy and future generations of women could build on. The services of the WAVES during the war enabled women to get their foot in the door and slowly legislation that has limited women in the Navy has been lifted.

¹³⁷ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Company, 1993), 180.

¹³⁸ United States Navy, "Pushing Open the Door of Opportunity,"

<http://www.navy.mil/navco/speeches/2004/loewer-whm04.txt>. December 15, 2007.

¹³⁹ Ebbert and Hall, 200.

The WAVES and the passage of the Integration Act are an important piece of U.S. women's and military history. The Integration Act's passage was the culmination of the hard work and dedication of the military's men and women. While many scholars have written about women's roles in the military and their contributions during the war, few have focused on the WAVES exclusively. These works tend to focus on women's history over an extended period of time and fail to present a thorough examination of the WAVES. Many memoirs have been written, and while these stories are important they do not represent an objective or scholarly analysis. Scholarly work and memoirs are important in helping readers understand women's and military history in a general sense, but they do not explore in depth the WAVES or their contributions to the Integration Act. This thesis provides a fresh perspective and an in-depth study of the WAVES and the contributions of its eighty-six thousand women. In addition, the thesis' broad range of sources is an excellent starting point for anyone looking to further research women and World War II.

While all the women who participated in World War II deserve their own special place in history, the WAVES are unique because they were the first to break the traditional barriers that existed within the military. Unlike the Army, the Navy recruited women to serve in it and not along side it. It was not long before the Army, Marines and Coast Guard all realized that they too needed to integrate women into their ranks if they expected to attract the same caliber of women as the Navy. Although the WAVES were limited to serving within the Naval Reserve during the war, it was still a revolutionary step forward for women and the Navy. The WAVES challenged the established stereotypes that existed before and after the war and proved that women's wartime gains were not temporary as others have argued. Walter Donaldson's song, *How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Paree)?* was written after World War I and clearly represents the accomplishments of the WAVES during the war. These women had experienced the world during the war. They traveled, visited large cities, made friends from all over the country and played an incredibly significant role in the war. There was no way that women would be able to return to the traditional ways that existed before the war. As a direct result of women's accomplishments in the Navy during the war, women that join the Navy today can expect a career filled with adventure, excitement and new experiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Adair, Charles. Interviewed by John T. Mason. U.S. Naval Institute, 8 April 1975.

Boyea, Ruthe W. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 5 July 2001.

Brown, Nona Baldwin. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 27 September 1997.

Carlson, Elizabeth Malm. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 19 February 2001.

Cocroft, Emily Stone. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 24 September 1996.

Crandall, Elizabeth B. Interviewed by Etta Belle Kitchen. U.S. Naval Institute, 18 July 1970.

De Wildt, Donna Beebe. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 8 July 1996.

Hancock, Joy Bright. Interviewed by John T. Mason. U.S. Naval Institute, 12 November 1969.

Hawthorne, Mary E. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 24 August 1994.

Hyland, John J. Interviewed by Paul Stillwell. U.S. Naval Institute, 1 June 1984.

Gibbs, June. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 26 March 1996.

King, Cesil S. Interviewed by Paul Stillwell. U.S. Naval Institute, 4 August 1986.

Kitchen, Etta Belle. Interviewed by John T. Mason. U.S. Naval Institute, 6 May 1969.

McAfee, Mildred. Interviewed by John T. Mason. U.S. Naval Institute, 25 August 1969.

McNiel, Tina. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 25 October 1994.

Naval Historical Center. "Establishment of Women's Reserve, Public Law 689, H.R. 6807, 30 July 1942." <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq48-3e.htm>. November 17, 2007.

---. "History of Women in the Navy." <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq48-3b.htm>. November 17, 2007.

---. "Uniform Regulations, Women's Reserve, United States Naval Reserve, 1943." <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq59-22.htm>. November 17, 2007.

O'Connor, Eileen F. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 24 February 1993.

Palmer, Jean. Interviewed by John T. Mason. U.S. Naval Institute, 19 May 1969.

Petrucci, Janet Coit. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 20 March 1998.

Petterson, Helen Jackson Donnelly. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 4 September 2003.

Small, Ruth Lovejoy. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 26 March 2003.

Smith, Margaret Chase. Interviewed by John T. Mason. U.S. Naval Institute, 23 June 1969.

United States Senate, Committee on the Armed Services. Women's Armed Services Integration Act. 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947. Government Printing Office.

White, Luisa Costagliola. Interviewed by Evelyn M. Cherpak. Naval War College Archives, 6 November 1996.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Alsmeyer, Marie Beth. *The Way of the WAVES: Women in the Navy*. Conway, Arizona: Hamba Books, 1981.

Anderson, Karen. *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Banner, Lois W. *Women in Modern America: A Brief History*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974.

Berube, Allan. *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*. New York: Penguin Group, 1990.

Campbell, D'Ann. "The Regimented Women of World War II." *Women, Militarism, and War: Essays in History, Politics, and Social Theory*, edited by Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias. Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990.

Campbell, D'Ann. *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Chafe, William H. *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920–1970*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

---. *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Cherpak, Evelyn M. "So Proudly They Served: Rhode Island WAVES in World War II." *Rhode Island History* 61 (2003): 3-18.

Clive, Alan. *State of War: Michigan in World War II*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979.

Cobble, Dorothy Sue. *Recapturing Working Class Feminism: Union Women in the Postwar Era*. Edited by Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

Collins, Winifred Quick. *More Than a Uniform: A Navy Woman in a Navy Man's World*. Denton, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1997.

Diedrich, Maria, and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, eds. *Women and War: The Changing Social Status of American Women from the 1930s to the 1950s*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Ebbert, Jean, and Marie-Beth Hall. *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan Company, 1993.

Gildersleeve, Virginia Crocheron. *Many a Good Crusade*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1954.

Gluck, Sherna B. *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987.

Godson, Susan H. *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the US Navy*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001.

Gruhzit-Hoyt, Olga. *They Also Served: American Women in World War II*. New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995.

Gunter, Helen Clifford. *Navy WAVE: Memories of World War II*. Fort Bragg, California: Cypress House Press, 1992.

Hancock, Joy Bright. *Lady in the Navy: A Personal Reminiscence*. Annapolis: The Naval Institute Press, 1972.

Hartmann, Susan M. *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Holm, Jeanne M., ed. *In Defense of a Nation: Servicewomen in World War II*. Arlington: Vandamere Press, 1998.

---. *Women in the Military*. Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1992.

Larson, C. Kay. *'Til I Come Marching Home: A Brief History of American Women in World War II*. Pasadena, Maryland: The Minerva Center, 1995.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Milkman, Ruth. *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Ross, Nancy Wilson. *The WAVES: The Story of the Girls in Blue*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943.

Rothman, Sheila M. *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978.

Skylighters. "Great Quotations of World War II." <http://www.skylighters.org/quotations/quotes6.html>. November 17, 2007.

Smith, Margaret Chase. *Declaration of Conscience*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1972.

Terkel, Studs. *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Weatherford, Doris. *American Women and World War II*. New York: Facts of File, 1990.

Yellin, Emily. *Our Mother's War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*. New York: Free Press, 2004.